A Textbook of the Satsang Examinations Series: 5

NILKANTH CHARITRA

(Bhagwan Swaminarayan's pilgrimage of India as a young ascetic)

Translation by: BAPS Sadhus

Gujarati Text: Prof. Ramesh M. Dave

SWAMINARAYAN AKSHARPITH
Ahmedabad

NILKANTH CHARITRA (English Edition)
(Bhagwan Swaminarayan's pilgrimage of India as a young ascetic)

A textbook for the examination prescribed under the curriculum set by Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha.

Inspirer: HDH Pramukh Swami Maharaj

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BLESSINGS

The youth movement established and nourished by Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj has been expanding at a very rapid pace. With a view to satisfying the aspirations and the thirst for knowledge of the youth joining the organisation, and also to enable them to understand and imbibe the principles of Akshar and Purushottam expounded by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, the publications division, Swaminarayan Aksharpith, organised under the auspices of Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha, has produced a series of books.

Through these books, it is intended to impart systematic, sustained and pure knowledge in simple language on a scholastic basis to children and youth of the Swaminarayan Sampraday. It is hoped that this Sanstha, established by Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj for implementing and propagating the Vedic ideals propounded by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, will, through this activity, spread the ideals and noble traditions of the Sampraday and through it, the culture and heritage of the Hindu religion.

It is the aim of this project to preach and spread the divine message of Bhagwan Swaminarayan to all corners of the world. We hope that all religious-minded truth-seekers of the Sampraday and those outside of it, will welcome this activity and be inspired by its universal principles and ideals.

In order to encourage children and youths, annual examinations are held based on the curriculum as worked out in these books. Certificates are also awarded to successful candidates. We bless Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, Prof. Rameshbhai Dave, Kishorebhai Dave, and all others who have cooperated in preparing these books.

Vasant Panchmi
V.S. 2028 (1972 CE)
Atladra

Shastri Narayanswarupdasji
(Pramukh Swami Maharaj)
Jai Swaminarayan

INTRODUCTION

We read in 'Ghanshyam Charitra' about Shriji Maharaj's divine and miraculous childhood sports. After that Ghanshyam Maharaj renounced the world and sojourned in the forests. He was then known as Nilkanth Varni. He travelled to various pilgrim places in India for seven years. He undertook severe austerities. Finally he met Ramanand Swami who initiated him into the sadhu-order and renamed him Sahajanand, and appointed him as his spiritual heir. The account of the extraordinary life of the Lord narrated in 'Nilkanth Charitra' is based on the established scriptures of the Swaminarayan Fellowship. For the convenience of readers, a map indicating Nilkanth's travels has also been incorporated.

Many interesting anecdotes found in the various accounts of Nilkanth's life, which may awaken the varied interests of youths and inspire them to higher spiritual endeavour, are narrated here.

The present publication is a translation, with slight modifications to suit the medium, of the Gujarati book 'Nilkanth Charitra'.

The book has been so designed as to serve part of the examination curriculum for youths. More specifically, it is offered as a textbook for the second of the examinations, 'Satsang Pravesh', in the series.

It is our earnest prayer that children, youths and aspirants of knowledge will study these books carefully and pass the examinations with flying colours and, above all, derive immense spiritual benefit and please Bhagwan Swaminarayan and our beloved Guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Shri Swaminarayano Vijayate



*Ame sau Swãminã bãlak, marishu Swãmine mãte;
Ame sau Shrijitanã yuvak, ladishu Shrijine mãte.

Nathi dartã nathi kartã, amãrã janni parvã;
Amãre dar nathi koino, ame janmyã chhie marvã.

Ame ã yagna ãrambhyo, balidãno ame daishu;
Amãrã Akshar Purushottam, Gunãtit gnãnne gaishu.

Ame sau Shrijitanã putro, Akshare vãs amãro chhe;
Swadharmi bhasma choli to, amãre kshobh shãno chhe.

Juo sau Motinã Swãmi, na rãkhi kãi te khãmi;
Pragat Purushottam pãmi, malyã Gunãtit Swãmi.

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* For meaning see page 124

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NEW REVISED EDITION

This sixth edition of 'Nilkanth Charitra' is notable for two major changes. First is the use of colour illustations. Second, compared with previous editions, some chapters have been removed, some new chapters have been added and others have been revised.

This revised edition is based on the 5-volume biography, *Bhagwan Swaminarayan,* written by Shri Harshadbhai T. Dave, and is now the accepted textbook for use in the Satsang Examinations.

Publication Committee
Swaminarayan Aksharpith

1. "TELL MY PEOPLE I AM SAFE"

It was the morning of 29 June 1792 (Ashadh *sud* 10, Samvat 1848). The Saryu river on the outskirts of Ayodhya was in spate. Kaushik, the demon was very pleased with himself. He had reason to be happy. He had hurled the 11-year-old Nilkanth Varni in the rampaging river which had burst its banks. His master, Kaliya, had asked him to do the dastardly deed. Kaushik was jumping with joy. He was behaving like one intoxicated after a victory. But before he could go to his master to report what he considered to be the success of his mission, his end came. In his mad frenzy, Kaushik dashed against a tree which fell on him with a thundering noise and crushed him to death.

Nilkanth survived the deluge. He passed through a massive wave and landed on the opposite bank. It was a miracle as few could have come out alive. The Bal Brahmachari who had a tulsi *mala* in his hand was not at all ruffled by the incident. He was exultant as he had renounced the world that very day and snapped all worldly ties. After reaching the bank he started walking. The atmosphere was serene. Peacocks and other creatures were
making the most of the rain, the flood notwithstanding.

Nilkanth looked splendid. There was a glow on his round, tender face. His eyes had a clear vision of his goal to redeem souls. His black, curly *jata*, and the *kamandal* in his hand proclaimed to the world that a new, extraordinary ascetic was born.

The young Brahmachari walked for some time and reached a banyan tree. He sat in *padmasan* and started meditating. When he opened his eyes, he saw Hanumanji before him with folded hands. "How did you get here?" the young ascetic asked. "Maharaj, I am in the habit of having your *darshan* daily. I looked for you at your house in

Ayodhya but I did not find you there. So I searched for you on the bank of the Saryu. I did not find you there either. Then I sat in meditation and traced you to this place. I am eager to serve you. Now, if it is your wish then I will stay with you and serve you."

"At present I wish to travel alone. However, when I remember you come immediately. And one more thing, tell the people of Ayodhya that I am safe and well." And with these words Nilkanth closed his eyes in meditation.

2. THE ATTRIBUTES OF A TYAGI

After leaving home, Nilkanth spent the first night under a banyan tree. The next morning on Ashad sud 11, as was his practice, He got up early, performed his ablutions and again sat under the tree. Soon the residents of Amarpur village started flocking to the place. They were greatly impressed by the calm on the Brahmachari's face, and were debating as to whether Swami Kartikeyiji or Dhruvji had come in person. They ran to their homes to get whatever offerings they could lay their hands on. Soon there was a pile of fruits, sweets and other kinds of eatables. The young ascetic had a Shaligram with him. First he made an offering to it and then sparingly ate some of the eatables. After this he distributed everything to the assembled villagers. They were greatly surprised by his virtue of non-possession. They advised him, "Brahmachariji, why don't you keep something for this evening." Nilkanth smiled at them and said, "If I were to think about food for this evening or tomorrow, then what was the point in renouncing my home! A *tyagi* should be detached like the sky. Having renounced with faith in God, then God will provide as necessary." The village folks were attracted by Nilkanth's divine, sweet words.

Then Nilkanth reassured them, "Now you may go. I

fear no one. My powers prevail in all things." The simple villagers did not understand these divine words of Nilkanth.

Nilkanth then departed from that place. He crossed rivers and dense forests as he progressed in his sojourn. Wherever he stopped, the villagers were attracted by his divine form. They brought fruits and other eatables for him. As usual he would first offer them to Thakorji and then take a little for himself.

He walked northwards towards the Himalayas. He did not remember his brothers, sister-in-law and friends. He walked briskly, looking all the while over his shoulder to see that nobody was pursuing him to take him home.

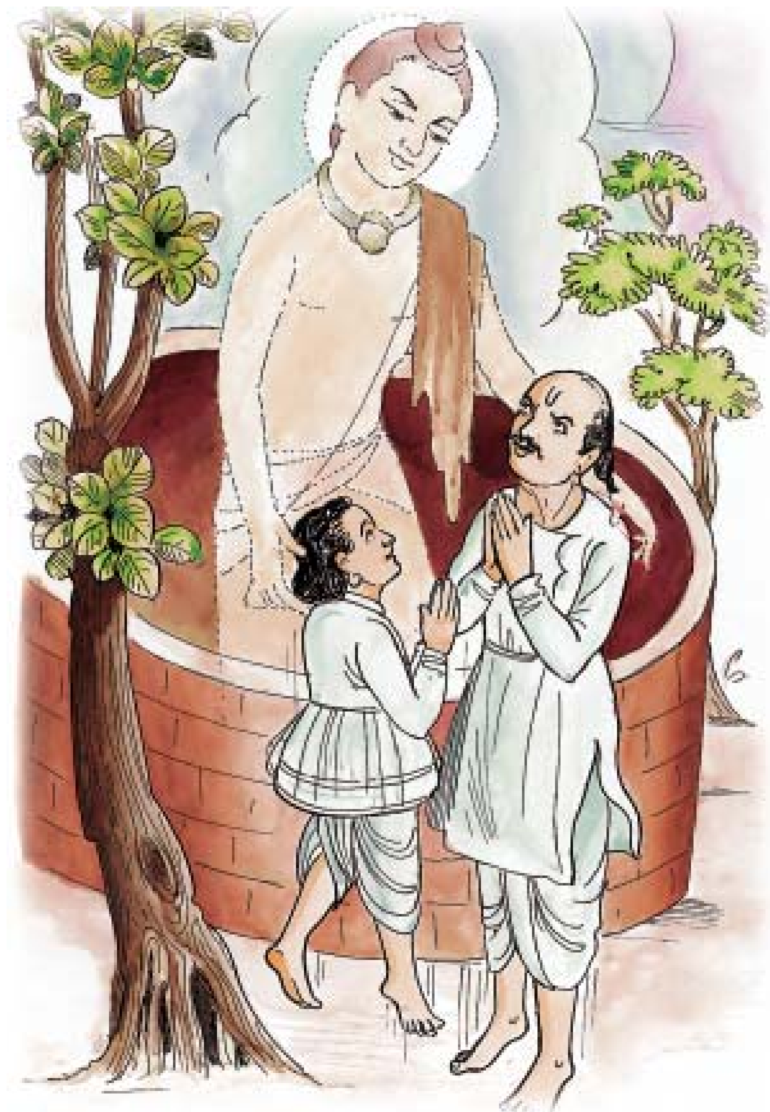
Nilkanth was God himself. He had no need to do austerities, but still he was going to undertake austerities for the redemption of countless people.

3. GIVES DARSHAN TO VENIRAM AND REVIVES RAGHUNANDAN

Meanwhile, in Ayodhya, Ghanshyam's renunciation had plunged the city into grief and sadness. Thinking that Ghanshyam might have gone to Chhapaiya, Rampratapbhai went there and searched for him for seven days, but to no avail. Even the friends of Ghanshyam searched for him until they too got tired. Suddenly, Veniram remembered that Ghanshyam often jumped into the deep well of the village. He said to himself, "Let me go and look in the well. If Ghanshyam is not to be found there, I shall also kill myself by drowning in the well."

Having thought thus, Veniram plunged into the well but could not find Ghanshyam. When Veniram did not come out even after an hour, his father, Motiram, got worried and he too jumped into the well to save his son. The well was very deep and dark. Motiram began to drown

in the well. As time passed neither father or son came out of the well. Veniram's mother and maternal uncle also went there and began to cry and beat their chests in despair.



Ghanshyam saves Veniram and Motiram

Ghanshyam took pity on them and thus appeared in the well in his divine form. At once, the well was flooded with divine light. Gently he lifted Veniram and his father out of the well, and then disappeared into the sky. Veniram was overjoyed at this good fortune of having had the *darshan* of Ghanshyam.

Ghanshyam had another close friend, Raghunandan, who was the son of a Bania. He too searched for Ghanshyam for seven days, but when he could not find him, he became very dejected and thought, “What joy is left for me in life without Ghanshyam?”

Thinking thus, Raghunandan went to the Narayan lake, and sitting under a mango tree began to meditate on Ghanshyam. So great was his grief that he could no longer bear it and he died during his meditation.

As Raghunandan did not return home till late evening, his parents became worried. With the assistance of Rampratapbhai they began to search for their son. Rampratapbhai, who was already deeply anguished at Ghanshyam’s departure, became all the more unhappy at the disappearance of Raghunandan.

They all set out for Narayan lake in search of Raghunandan. Seeing the grief of these three persons, Hanumanji appeared in the sky and informed Rampratapbhai in a heavenly voice, “Your younger brother has gone to the forest to perform austerities. After that He will establish his own Fellowship on earth for the moral and spiritual regeneration of mankind. Then he will send for you and give his *darshan*. Therefore please do not lament over his absence any more.” On hearing this, Rampratapbhai was greatly relieved.

Continuing their search for Raghunandan, they came to a mango tree. There they found Raghunandan’s dead body. His parents began to sob bitterly. Seeing their anguish,

Ghanshyam came down from the sky in a divine form and brought Raghunandan back to life. He made him sit up and said, “I have not left you. I shall give you my *darshan* whenever you remember me. But don’t abandon your life like this.” Thus, Ghanshyam gave *darshan* to Raghunandan, his parents and Rampratapbhai in his divine form and then disappeared.

Proceeding further, Nilkanth reached Lodheshwar,



‘I shall give you my darshan whenever you remember me.’

where there is a mandir called Lodheshwar Mahadev and a lake of the same name. Nilkanth bathed in the lake and had the *darshan* of Mahadev. After a night at the mandir, he continued his journey and passing through Jetpur and Pathepur, he came to Naimisharanya (Kherilapur).

There is a lake in Naimisharanya called Chakratirth around which there are many mandirs. After visiting all the sacred places in Naimisharanya, where thousands of years ago Sutji had recited the *Shrimad Bhagwat* before Shaunak and other sages, Nilkanth proceeded further towards the north.

After passing through Sahejapur and Bareli on the way, he entered a dense forest. The way ahead was very difficult. The forest was so thick that it remained completely dark even during the day. It abounded in dense bushes and numerous wild animals like lions, tigers, leopards, wolves, jackals, hyenas and elephants. It was infested with snakes, crabs, wild owls and scorpions. One had to walk over heaps of dry leaves. The area was so isolated and fearful that one would tremble to death on hearing the thundering roars of the wild beasts. But Nilkanth walked on through this dark and terrifying forest, undaunted and unperturbed.

4. REDEMPTION OF ASCETICS

The road was very difficult with many dense forests on the way. The vegetation was so thick that the forests were dark even during the day.

Continuing his journey on foot through the thick jungle, Nilkanth came to a banyan tree. He saw some ascetics sitting under the tree. He went to them and asked, “O ascetics, why have you come here ? Where will you go from here?” The ascetics replied, “O Varniraj, we are going to the Himalayas to perform penance. We wish to propitiate God through our austerities. We shall undertake severe

penance after reaching the Himalayas in the north in order to attain salvation."

The ascetics then asked Nilkanth, "Why have you come alone to this harsh jungle? We are many, still we are mortally afraid of wild animals at night. How is it that you are moving about so fearlessly? Who are you? Are you not afraid of tigers, wolves and lions? As you are clad only in a loincloth, don't you feel cold at night?"

Nilkanth replied, "I am *atma*, distinct from the physical body, and unattached to family and relatives. I am free from carnal desire, anger, avarice and other vices. I am beyond *Akshar,* which is *sat-chit-anand*. I am beyond the three states (waking, dream and deep sleep), the three bodies (gross, subtle and causal) and the three qualities (*sattva, rajas* and *tamas*). I am the divine embodiment of the Supreme God. I am also going to the Himalayas for the redemption of countless *jivas*. But tell me how will you attain salvation without meeting God in human manifestation? Even if your bodies were to become mere skeletons through penance, how would you attain salvation without knowing a living God?"

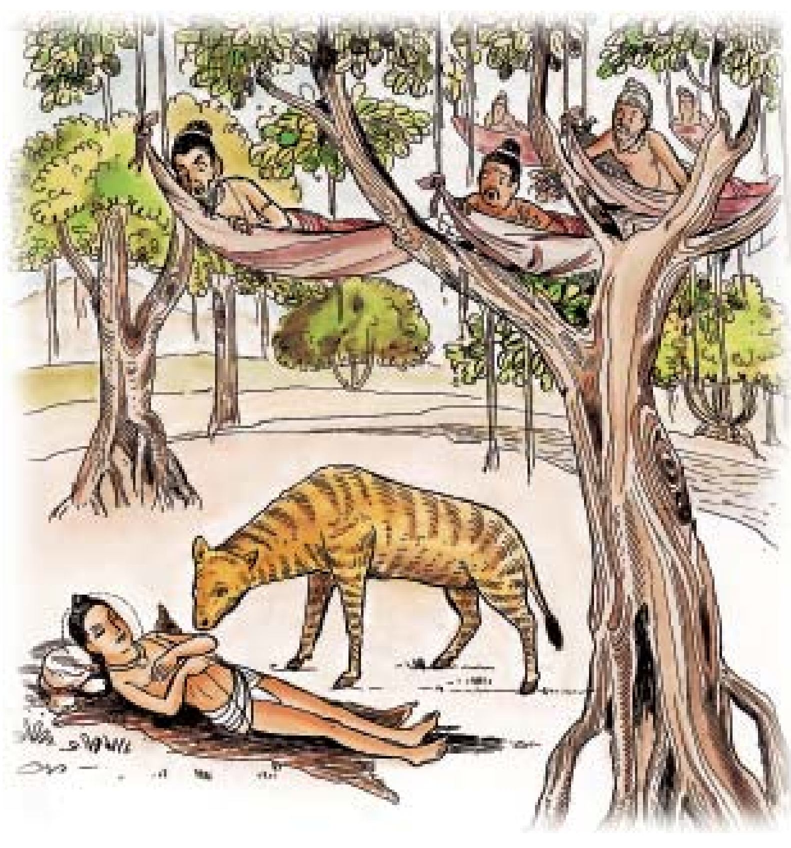
On hearing this, the ascetics were wonder struck. They asked, "O Varniraj! Where can we find a living God and when? How can we attain salvation?" Nilkanth replied, "If you are sincere and earnest in your quest, you will find God incarnate right here. Recognise him, and you will immediately attain salvation."

The ascetics were overjoyed on hearing Nilkanth. They felt Nilkanth himself was God incarnate. They followed Nilkanth, listened to his soul-elevating discourses; and served him devoutly.

Nilkanth was pleased with their services and their faith. He gave *darshan* to the ascetics in the *chaturbhuj* form of Narayan Bhagwan. The ascetics were greatly exhilarated at this *darshan*.

They continued their journey towards the Himalayas. One night Nilkanth, along with the ascetics, rested under a banyan tree. There was a roar of tigers and lions from all sides. The chirping of crickets, the hissing of snakes and the hooting of owls could be heard from time to time. Overcome by fear, the ascetics tied their hammocks to the branches of a tree and went to sleep in them. Nilkanth, on the other hand, stretched himself on plain ground, about a few steps away from the tree.

A ferocious hyena came there at midnight. It let out a



The ascetics look in fright to see what the hyena would do to Nilkanth

loud howl, sniffed the ground and went round Nilkanth and finally sat under the banyan tree. The ascetics were watching this from their hammocks. The hyena began to stare at the hammocks hanging high up. On seeing this, the ascetics were frightened all the more. Bewildered, they lay motionless in their hammocks, and began to pray to Nilkanth.

At daybreak, the hyena stood up, looked up at the banyan tree once again and then lashing its tail fiercely on the ground twice, it went on its way. At that time the ascetics were focussed on Nilkanth. He bestowed salvation on them. Thus uplifting the ascetics, Nilkanth continued his onward journey.

5. ON THE WAY TO BADRINATH

After a nine-day trek through the forest, Nilkanth passed through Bahadurpur and reached the banks of the river Ganga. He crossed the sacred river by boat. Finally, he reached Haridwar where he bathed in the waters of Ganga and had *darshan* at the Mahadev mandir situated on its bank. There was a *Kumbh Mela* at Haridwar. The *bawas* and the *vairagis* from all corners of the land had gathered there. The fair was overflowing with *jogis* and *jatis*, sadhus and sannyasis of all sorts. Nilkanth went round the fair giving *darshan* to all and redeeming them. In the guise of Brahmins, Mahadev and Parvatiji, served Nilkanth for many days at the fair.

Proceeding from here Nilkanth reached Tapovan. Seeing the beautiful grove, Nilkanth experienced great joy. He stayed there for ten days. Many ascetics, engrossed in penance for ages, felt elated at the *darshan* of Nilkanth. Nilkanth visited the hermitage where Dhruvji had performed severe penance. From there he reached Laxmanjhula (Lakshmanpura). There is a mandir of

Lakshmanji on the banks of Ganga. Nilkanth bathed in the cold waters of the Ganga and paid homage to the image of Lakshman in the mandir. Lakshman himself emerged from his image and bowed at the feet of Nilkanth. Nilkanth held him by his hands and raised him, and gave him *darshan* in the divine form of Shri Ramachandra. On this auspicious occasion even Gangaji appeared there in the form of a beautiful woman and, placing some fresh fruits at his feet, bowed to Nilkanth. Seeing her devotion, Nilkanth ate a few fruits and distributed the rest to Lakshmanji and Gangaji as *prasad*. Then thinking that Nilkanth must be thirsty, Lakshmanji at once ran down to the river. He filled up a pot with water, and after carefully filtering it with his apron, brought it to Nilkanth. Nilkanth accepted and quenched his thirst. In response to the devotion shown by Lakshman, Nilkanth stayed there for ten days.

6. SPURNS MAHANTSHIP

Thereafter, Nilkanth crossed the bridge, proceeded further and reached the city of Shripur. At this place Uddhavji, on being separated from Shri Krishna, had performed austerities thousands of years ago. Nilkanth visited this location. Knowing the sanctity of the place, Naradji had built the city of Shripur there. It was also known as Shrikshetra. Since the river Alaknanda flows here in the form of a bow, the place is also known as Dhanushtirth.

When Nilkanth Varni reached Shripur it was late evening. He saw a hermitage outside the village and sat on a small platform nearby. On seeing the illustrious Brahmachari the *mahant* of the hermitage was impressed. He said, “Brahmachari please come inside the ashram. If you stay outside there is danger from wild animals. It is not proper for you to sit outside.”

The young ascetic did not take any notice of the *mahant's* entreaties. He sat in meditation. The *mahant* said again, "Brahmachari! You must be very hungry. Come inside. Have food and take rest." When there was no response even to this, the *mahant* thought the young celibate was observing a vow of silence. He shook him and said, "Maharaj! Listen to me. If you do not want to come inside the ashram, please go to the village and stay there for the night because there is imminent death here."

Then Nilkanth said, "I do not stay where there are many people. I prefer to live outside a village, in a place like this and under the sky. I am not afraid of death."

The *mahant* still tried to reason, "Why are you so stubborn? And why do you invite death when there is no need to?"

But the *mahant's* efforts were to no avail. Nilkanth sat outside the ashram in deep meditation on a deer skin.

It was past midnight. Suddenly there was an earth-shaking roar of a lion. The *mahant* and the villagefolk woke up because of the deafening roar. The *mahant* was worried about Nilkanth's safety. The lion broke out in a terrifying roar once again, started thrashing its tail vigorously and sprang with outstretched claws towards where Nilkanth was sitting. Some birds fell off their perches as a result of the roar. Varni sent the lion into a trance by his divine gaze. The ferocious beast which was roaring till then lay at Nilkanth's feet without making a sound. The *mahant* who was watching the proceedings was greatly surprised.

Nilkanth patted the lion and it started licking his feet. The surprised *mahant* exclaimed, "He is indeed an incarnation of God!" The lion was behaving like a meek cow before Varni. It was not a big achievement for Nilkanth. All he wished to do was to redeem anyone who came to him. At the break of dawn, the young ascetic got up and started

towards the river bank for his ablutions. The lion followed him like a kitten. When the Brahmachari reached the water's edge, he ordered it to go back. Quietly, bowing his head, the lion slipped into the bushes.

The *mahant* and his disciples were watching all this from a distance. He came to where the Varni was. He spoke to him with folded hands, "Brahmachari you are a very valorous person. I wish you stay in our ashram. I shall make you the *mahant*. We have an annual income of Rs. 100,000."

Varni interrupted him, "If I was interested in ashrams or income why would I leave home. I have to visit many pilgrim places and redeem countless souls. And I want to explain to the world about true *satsang*."

He spurned the offer of *mahantship* and vanished into the nearby bushes. Nilkanth bathed in the Alaknanda and proceeded towards the mountains.

First he climbed the Chittabhang mountain and then the Manbhang mountain and went down on the other side. There again he gave *darshan* to the ascetics engaged in penance. He sanctified Uddhavaji's hermitage and then reached Guptakashi. In *Satyug* many ascetics had undergone austerities here to please Bholanath Shankar. After having *darshan* of the *ling* image of Kashivishvanath Mahadev, Nilkanth reached Uttarakhand. Many old mandirs are situated here, the foremost among them being that of Vishwanathji. After *darshan*, Nilkanth proceeded to Gangotri. Passing through Guptaprayag, he crossed the swinging bridge and went to the Triyuginarayan mandir. After visiting the mandir, he arrived at Gaurikund and bathed in the hot water spring. After giving *darshan* to the *murti* of goddess Parvati in the Parvati mandir, he went ahead and reached Kedarnath.

7. VISITS BADRINATH AND MANAS SAROVAR

There are twelve self-born *Jyotirlings* in India, one of which is located at the mandir of Kedarnath.

After visiting it and worshipping the *Jyotirling*, Nilkanth continued his journey towards the Greater Himalayas or Himagiri. He walked on through the mountains for nine days and at last reached Badrinath. There in the mandir with its brightly decorated pinnacle, he had the *darshan* of Bhagwan Badrinath, and Nar Narayan. The priest of the mandir was deeply drawn towards this child celibate. He saw in Nilkanth, Bhagwan Badrinarayan himself, and out of deep respect for him he offered his services to him. Everyday he would garland Nilkanth and serve him food. Nilkanth stayed there till the Diwali festival after the celebration of *Annakut*.

During the four months of winter it is very cold in Badrinath. Sometimes there are hailstorms and rain. Everything is covered with snow so the *murti* of Bhagwan Badrinath is brought down and installed in the Jyotishvar mandir of Joshimath for worship.

The *pujari* respectfully brought Nilkanth to Joshimath on an elephant. Nilkanth stayed here in the mandir for a few days.

From Joshimath, a very precipitous road passes via the valley of Niti, leading to Manas Sarovar and from there towards Kailas. Nilkanth Varni continued his journey through this difficult and extremely cold Himalayan region. The cold winds penetrated the body like sharp arrows. Hailstones also rained. But unmindful of his body, Nilkanth walked on and reached Badrivan (Adi-Badri).

There is the ashram of Narayan Rishi here. The place is isolated. It was here that Nar and Narayan had performed austerities for more than fifty years, beseeching the

Supreme God to come on earth. Today, God in the form of Nilkanth had come to bless them with the fruits of their austerities. Everyone was happy on having the *darshan* of Nilkanth and both Nar and Narayan prayed, "No one knows your glory. It is because of your powers that we are great. And those who believe us as greater than you know not your true greatness." Then Nar and Narayan and many other rishis worshipped Nilkanth Varni. Perceiving their love and affection Nilkanth stayed in the ashram for three months during winter. Nilkanth Varni performed austerities here and he gave the divine bliss of his form to thousands of rishis.

After completing his stay here he blessed Nar and Narayan, "You have served me well, therefore, I shall install your *murti* on earth." Nilkanth then resumed his pilgrimage and walking barefoot in the snow reached Manas Sarovar. He had his bath in the clear waters of the lake and bestowed his blessings on the white swans gliding gracefully on the lake. This place is the source of the river Saryu. Nilkanth bathed in the mouth of the river Saryu, paid obeisance to Kailas mountain from a distance and turned back. Thus, continuing his journey on foot, he returned to Badrinath on the day of Akhatrij.

8. DISCOURSE TO MAHARAJA RANJIT SINGH

The valiant ruler of Punjab, Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who was on a visit to Badrinath met Nilkanth Varni. He was greatly impressed by the magnetic personality of the youthful Brahmachari. He caught hold of the young celibate's feet and declared, "I am not going to leave you. So, please do not leave me. I shall do whatever you want me to do." Nilkanth told him that he could not stay with him and said, "I shall meet you later wherever you are. But for now you must go." The Maharaja was sorely

disappointed by Nilkanth's instruction. But he derived comfort from the fact that the young Brahmachari had agreed to meet him again.

Nilkanth once again scaled the peaks and reached Gangotri. There is a Gangaji mandir there. Varni paid his respects and started going up the Himalayas in Uttarakhand and came to Haridwar at the foot. At Harki Pedi Ranjit Singh once again met him. The Sikh ruler sat at Nilkanth's feet and expressed his inclination to surrender his empire to him. But the young ascetic was not interested in it at all. He said after blessing him, "Remember me and govern your kingdom. When you realise my knowledge then your kingdom will not be a bondage." Nilkanth placed his hand on the ruler's head and gave him a glimpse of his divine personality. Ranjit Singh experienced supreme bliss. Afterwards Nilkanth visited Ayodhya incognito and stayed there for some time.

9. COMPASSIONATE NILKANTH

Only ten months had passed since Nilkanth had renounced his home. After blessing the town of Ayodhya, Nilkanth trekked along the banks of the River Saryu. Passing through forests and groves, in the upper north eastern Himalayas, Nilkanth arrived in Bansi. A river flowed by at a short distance from the city and there was a beautiful garden, too. Nilkanth went to the river every morning for his bath. There were beautiful birds of many kinds chirping in the garden.

One day, Nilkanth after bathing in the river, came to the garden for meditation. At that time two servants of the king entered the garden. Heedless of the presence of Nilkanth they aimed their rifles at a spot and fired. And the bullets hit a couple of birds which fell down from the tree, screaming and struggling for life. The helpless eyes of both

birds stared at Nilkanth and they soon died. Nilkanth blessed them and redeemed their souls. He was deeply pained at the cruel behaviour of the king's servants. He became sad and dejected. On that day he observed a fast. He did not go to the city again but spent the whole day in the garden. His heart was greatly moved with compassion. He could not bear any sort of violence.

At midnight he suddenly woke up. A thought casually passed through his mind, "Let this city be burned!" And Nilkanth decided to leave the city. But immediately after this, he withdrew that thought saying to himself, "No, a sadhu should be forgiving. He should not even harbour a thought which may cause harm to anyone."

But as a result of his first casual utterance, the city of Bansi went up in flames. The god of fire had already set it aflame from the heavens. The fire started from the king's palace and rapidly spread to the whole city. There was great commotion. The king, the queen and all the citizens began to flee the city.

When Nilkanth saw this, he felt compassion for the citizens. Instantly he plunged in the waters of the river and with that the fire was extinguished. Only the two servants who had killed the birds were burnt to death. The city was saved from being reduced to ashes.

Since such an incident occurred as a result of his casual utterance, Nilkanth stood in the water of the river, and taking a little water in the palm of his hands, took an oath and uttered a curse on his own speech, "If ever again such an impure thought passes through my mind even by mistake, let it not be fruitful. Let my words, on such an occasion, fail to bear any fruit."

After his bath and meditation, Nilkanth continued his journey.

10. NILKANTH IN VANSHIPUR

Early one morning Nilkanth sat under a banyan tree to perform his morning *puja*. At that time the king of Vanshipur who was out hunting, came there and saw the young Brahmachari. The resplendent face of the young *tapasvi* impressed the ruler as something out of the ordinary. The king was an ardent seeker of salvation and in Varni he recognised at once his spiritual guide. He was overjoyed and thought to himself, "Today Narayan has come in person to redeem me." At once he sought refuge at the young Brahmachari's feet. When Nilkanth opened his eyes he saw the king before him. He entreated Nilkanth to come to his palace and redeem him and his family. When he saw the sincerity in the ruler's request, the young celibate agreed to go with him. The king helped him sit on his royal horse, got hold of the reins and galloped to his city. On reaching his city his citizens thronged to both sides of the road to see their king leading a young Brahmachari to his palace. He received reverential salutation all along the route. Finally Nilkanth entered the *darbar* where the queen briskly and enthusiastically ran to receive the new guest. Everyone felt that the young Brahmachari was not an ordinary guest but God himself.

The royal couple were wanting in one thing. They did not have a male heir. They had two daughters, Ila and Sushila. They too were impressed by Nilkanth's illustrious personality. From that day onwards till he left the palace, Nilkanth was served devoutly by the king, queen, and their two daughters. The princesses would arrange *puja* materials for the Brahmachari. Fruits, flowers and water would be brought everyday by Sushila and Ila. Nilkanth would offer it to Thakorji. He used to eat very little himself and distribute the rest as *prasad*.

Varni would sometimes talk of his own life and sometimes about the past and the future. Everybody would listen to him with rapt attention. But the queen had some personal interest in keeping Varni in her kingdom.

One day she came to Nilkanth and said, "Brahmachariji! We would like to give this kingdom to you. Along with that we would give you our daughters in marriage. Therefore give up the bother of going to the forest to do austerities." Varni laughed at the worldly inclinations displayed by the queen and said, "Mother! I have still to wander the forests and redeem souls like you. I have come here as a result of your penance. You are very fortunate (in having me here)." The queen was greatly distressed and agitated on hearing this reply. "Brahmachari! Think carefully. You are a mere boy now. When you become a young man you will become restless without a woman? Kamdev has overcome great minds. Do you think he will leave you alone?"

Varni took pity on the queen and said, "My joy lies in going to the forest and meditating on Paramatma." The queen felt as if the ground was slipping from under her feet. "Is Varni going to leave us?" was the thought that worried her most. She made one last attempt to frighten Nilkanth by vividly describing the dangers of the forest. To this Varni had a ready answer: "Mother, I am not afraid of the forest, its ferocious creatures or the extremes of heat and cold. One should be afraid of worldly pleasures. I have come to this world to redeem people from the allurement of maya and take them to my Akshardham. I have not come to become attached to your kingdom or your daughters. However, since all of you have served me with devotion I shall grant you all Akshardham."

The veil of illusion was lifted from the queen's mind. She went into a divine trance. Nilkanth left the room. When

she awoke from the trance she was weeping. Her daughters advised her, "Mother we have in our midst a divine person who is pure and above mundane desires. Let us serve him according to his wishes. Do not be stubborn in your ways. Be insistent in keeping him within your heart and give up your mundane motives." These words were like nectar to the queen. Then Sushila and Ila rushed to Nilkanth's room. There they found him sitting in *swastik-asan* and in deep meditation. They had his *darshan*, came on tiptoe and made his bed. They also filled his gourd with fresh water, brought some fruits and flowers and quietly left the room.

Nilkanth sat in meditation for a long time. He lost count of time. It was late night. The palace gate was closed. Varni opened his eyes and thought that he should leave the place because the royal family, out of their faith in him, would definitely be redeemed. And with this resolve he left the palace in a flash.

The next morning when Sushila and Ila went to Nilkanth's room, they found it empty. They felt that he must have left the palace. The weeping princesses rushed to their mother to convey the news. The queen could not bear the terrible news and thus collapsed on the floor. The king was informed and soon the tragic news spread to different parts of the capital and the kingdom. People thronged to the palace to verify the report. There were scenes of mourning in the palace. The king ordered horse riders to fan out in different directions to search for Nilkanth. "Don't return without bringing the young Brahmachari," was the royal edict.

The mounted riders fanned out far and wide but found no trace of Nilkanth. The king himself went in search of Nilkanth but could not find any trace of him. He returned sorely distressed. Nilkanth assured the king through his uttering from the sky that he would be able to meet him later in Saurashtra.

11. ENTERS A DENSE FOREST

Nilkanth now embarked on the route to Kalaparvat in Nepal. Only a few dared to travel by that difficult route. He trekked for a month and came to an impenetrable forest in the valley of Kalaparvat. So thick was the forest that even sunlight could not penetrate the vegetation. As the young ascetic walked on the thick carpet of dried leaves snakes slithered out. Rhinos, wild buffaloes and other wild animals infested the forest. The forest was full of scorpions, snakes, spiders, etc. Even then Nilkanth walked in bare feet.

Nilkanth wished to reach Pulhashram. He had been journeying for three days and nights without rest. No food was available for four days. Nilkanth had been drained of all strength. He was so tired that he fainted and lost consciousness. On gaining consciousness, he saw a river and dragged himself there and had a bath. He bathed the Shaligram, and offered it water, fruits and flowers. Then he ate some *prasad* and performed *sandhya vandan*. That day marked an important milestone in the Brahmachari's life. It was one year and 43 days since he had left home. The day was 29 August 1893 (Shravan *vad* 8, Samvat 1850).

12. DESTRUCTION OF GHOSTS AND DELIVERANCE OF YOGIS

Nilkanth spread his *mrigcharma* under the shade of a large banyan tree and sat in meditation. Hanumanji had climbed upon a tree and was having the *darshan* of Nilkanth. When it was past midnight, terrible noises rent the atmosphere. Huge flames were seen at a distance. In a short time, fearful shapes began to approach nearer and nearer.

Hanumanji sat up and became alert. When he looked around, he saw a number of ghosts coming towards the tree from all sides in a menacing manner. Some of them

were short, while others were tall and tough. Some were as high as palm trees, and awfully fat. Some had long teeth while some had horns on their heads. They all had large bloodshot eyes and long nails. Screaming and shouting, the ghosts came near the tree. The king of ghosts was called Kalbhairav. He was walking ahead of them all with a sharp spear in his hand.

Kalbhairav came up and shouted an order to his followers, "Come on, jump on that boy and monkey, and devour them at once!"

Hanumanji got enraged on hearing this. With a roar he rushed towards the ghosts. He whirled his tail around and began to lash out at them. The jungle reverberated with screams and commotion. Some of the ghosts ran helter skelter for their lives while others ran, stumbling against one another, and hid themselves at a safe distance. Even the birds and animals of the forest were awakened by the



Hanumanji hits Kalbhairav on his head

screams and howls of the ghosts.

At this, Kalbhairav became terribly angry. He rushed towards Hanumanji. Hanumanji, with a single jump, pounced on him and winding his tail around him held him tight and hit him hard on the head with his fist. The blow was so severe that Kalbhairav's head sank into his trunk. A fountain of blood sprang forth. All the other ghosts ran away, terrified. The fight was over and all was quiet again.

At daybreak Nilkanth got up, had his bath and performed his worship. Hanumanji brought some sweet fruits. Nilkanth ate a few and gave the rest to Hanumanji. He was very pleased with Hanumanji and gave him his blessings. Then he proceeded to climb the mountain. The higher he climbed, the denser the vegetation became and when he reached the top, he was in the midst of the densest part of the jungle. The growth was so thick that it was dark even at noon.

In the middle of the forest, several yogis were performing penance. When they saw Nilkanth they were greatly pleased. They thought to themselves, "God himself has come today to give us *darshan*. Our penance of many years has at last borne fruit."

They received Nilkanth reverentially. They cleaned a cottage for him to stay and led him to the lake for a bath. After completing his bath and worship, Nilkanth asked them, "Wild vegetation seems to be growing here; can I get some fruits to eat?" The yogis replied, "We have got an *akshaypatra*. It gives us whatever we wish to eat at noon every day."

The yogis served Nilkanth with devotion for four days. They wished for different varieties of eatables from the *akshaypatra* and offered them to Nilkanth. On the fifth day when Nilkanth prepared to leave, all the yogis prostrated

before him and prayed, "Please bless us with your *bhakti* and deliver us."

Pleased with them, Nilkanth replied, "Continue your meditation for some time more. I have set out with the sole object of bestowing deliverance on all. When I reach the Navalakha mountain and redeem the nine hundred thousand yogis, you too will get your deliverance." All the yogis were extremely pleased to hear this and bade a warm farewell to Nilkanth.

13. MEETING WITH HIMALAYA

Nilkanth passed through dense Himalayan forests in Nepal. He trekked through a valley between Dhavalgiri and Shyamgiri mountains. When he saw a torrent of water flowing through the valley he realised there was no way to proceed further. But Nilkanth was determined to go to Pulhashram.

At that time Himalaya, the god of the mountains, came to Nilkanth in person, prostrated at his feet and asked, "Oh, merciful God ! Where have you come from? What is your wish? I have come for your *darshan* and to serve you." Nilkanth replied, "I want to go to Pulhashram to perform austerities, but I have lost my way. Therefore, please show me the way."

Himalaya replied, "Maharaj! The only way to proceed forward is through this torrent of water flowing between these two mountains. But the waters are infested with poisonous snakes, crocodiles and fish. I beseech you not to take this route."

Nilkanth, however, paid no heed to the words of Himalaya and plunged himself in the dangerous, turbulent waters. He walked all night against the water current and emerged from the cave early next morning. Nilkanth then proceeded on the shores of the Kali Gandki river.



Himalaya shows Nilkanth the way to Pulhashram

After trekking and overcoming many obstacles Nilkanth climbed to a height of 12,500 ft. and reached the pilgrim place of Muktanath.

14. SEVERE AUSTERITIES AT PULHASHRAM

Nilkanth did the *darshan* of the *murti* of Muktanath. He selected a place at Pulhashram or Muktanath to perform austerities. Pulhashram was a secluded and an extremely beautiful place. Here, Brahma's son Pulaha had performed austerities.

Nilkanth Varni, though only 12-years-old, began his austerities at the same spot where Bharat had performed his. The spot had since become famous as Bharatkund. It was the rainy season and the young celibate began his austerities despite lashing rains and cold winds. He held both his hands high and stood on one leg. Over his head was a large knot of matted hair. His body was thin and fair

in complexion. He fixed his gaze on the tip of his nose. He was heedless of hunger and thirst, and exposed his body to the elements. The austerities went on unhindered and soon it was reflected by the emaciated body of Nilkanth.

There were many yogis and *munis* staying in Pulhashram. They were astounded to see the severity of Nilkanth's austerities. They used to come and see him in the morning and evening but he was absorbed in austerities.

The rigorous austerities exposed every bone in his body. His veins were also visible. The once tender body became emaciated. The yogis and the *munis* thought, "Perhaps Narayan himself has come to perform such severe penance." Each day they came and knelt before Nilkanth and prayed, "O, God! Please bestow upon us the virtues of *vairagya* and austerities."

Dharmadev and Bhaktimata appeared in the sky on either side of Nilkanth in their divine forms protecting him. "Oh, enough, enough dear child," they prayed. Even Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh came for his *darshan* and to attend on him.

Nilkanth spent 2½ months in austerities and on the morning of the eleventh day of the bright half of the month of Kartik, Suryanarayan, the Sun god, appeared in human form before Nilkanth. Nilkanth happily requested him, "Kindly grant me a boon so that I may retain my vow of *naishtik brahmacharya* and have your *darshan* whenever I remember you."

"So be it," said Suryanarayan and added, "O God, you are Purushottam Narayan, the supreme incarnation and the cause of all incarnations. You are pure. Who am I to bestow a boon upon you? It is through your service, blessings and favour that I have attained such eminence and glory. And to prove that through *brahmacharya* one can attain a realised state you have performed these austerities. You have all the



Suryanarayan appears before Nilkanth

divine virtues, yet what you have asked will be fulfilled. You undertook such severe austerities so that the people on earth may learn renunciation, detachment and austere living from you."

The Sun god added humbly, "O Paramatma, it is my good fortune that you have kindly remembered me. Please do remember me whenever my services are required. I am always at your service." And so saying Suryanarayan

bowed to Nilkanth and disappeared. Nilkanth Varni was happy at successfully completing his austerities. He undertook penance to inspire aspirants to salvation.

Varni then, with emaciated body and resplendent form, crossed high lands and dense jungles, and took the route to Pokhra.

15. MOHANDAS MEETS NILKANTH

As Nilkanth was walking at a brisk pace through dense forests a sadhu called Mohandas saw him. He was greatly impressed by Varni's personality. He experienced bliss while in the presence of the young celibate. He was convinced Nilkanth had extraordinary spiritual powers. He bowed at the feet of Nilkanth and asked, "Brahmachari! I have lost my way while trekking through the Himalayan foot hills. But at this young age why are you roaming through this difficult terrain?" Mohandas asked.

"I am wandering to show the way to the likes of you who are lost," replied Varni.

The sadhu was convinced that Varni would show him the true path and decided to stay with him. The young Brahmachari permitted him to stay. He realised that the sadhu was eager to discover his true self but his mind was attracted to worldly things. Someone had presented Nilkanth with an attractive *kamandal*. Mohandas took a fancy for that. Though he did not want it, his mind remained fixed on it even while doing the *darshan* of Nilkanth.

While walking they came to a river. It had stones of all sizes covered with moss. Mohandas warned Varni, "Be careful while stepping over the stones. If you slip the *kamandal* will break." Nilkanth was really surprised at the concern of the sadhu for a mere *kamandal*. On reaching the opposite bank, Nilkanth dashed the *kamandal* against a

boulder and broke it. “What have you done? You have broken a beautiful *kamandal*,” Mohandas cried out.

Nilkanth replied, “Instead of concentrating on God you have become attached with this mundane thing. Then how will you get redeemed from this world?” A reformed Mohandas touched Varni’s feet.

A few days later they came across a tall tree from which violet mango-like fruits had fallen on the ground. Nilkanth started eating one. Mohandas, too, took one to eat it. “Don’t eat the fruits, they are poisonous,” Varni warned him. “If you eat them you will die.” Mohandas threw away the fruit.

Soon four *bawas* came. On seeing Nilkanth eating the fruit the *bawas* plucked some. Varni told Mohandas, “Tell them not to eat the fruits.” Mohandas told them that they were poisonous and they would die if they ate them.

“But why is the Brahmachari eating them?” the *bawas* questioned sternly.

“Because he is a great person,” Mohandas replied.

“We too are great,” boasted the *bawas*. And so out of arrogance they ate the fruits and died.

Several years later while Mohandas was on a pilgrimage to Dwarka he met Bhagwan Swaminarayan in Saurashtra. He took the saffron *diksha* from the Shriji Maharaj and was named Vrajanand Swami.

16. AT THE PALACE OF KING MAHADATT

Nilkanth Varni took the route to Pokhra. After walking for some time, he saw Tibet from a distance. It seemed as if he was in search of some sacred spot. After some time Nilkanth came to a beautiful town called Butolnagar. He decided to stay on the bank of the river in a beautiful garden after seeking the permission of the owner.

B*awas* were camping at the garden. As was his daily

routine, King Mahadatt and his sister Mayarani came to the garden in the morning. They saluted the *bawas* and touched their feet in reverence. Then the royal brother and sister came to where Nilkanth was staying. His spiritual glow, and emaciated body due to severe austerities convinced them that they were in the presence of an extraordinary soul. Tears came to their eyes when they saw the body of the young celibate. They prostrated at Varni's feet and insisted that he stay at their bungalow in the garden. Nilkanth agreed and he was given a special room all for himself. The royal personages visited him everyday and the young Brahmachari would discourse to them on spiritual matters. All this made the *bawas* extremely jealous.

Mahadatt's daughter used to come to the garden to play with her companions. The *bawas* would lustfully look at the princess and her companions. Nilkanth on the other hand would lower his eyes when the princess came to play. The difference in behaviour of the *bawas* and the young Brahmachari was conveyed to the king by the princess and her companions. The king was thus inspired with more reverence for Nilkanth.

The royal brother and sister implored Varni to come and stay with them in their palace. But he refused. He, however, out of their love for him, agreed to eat with them. The daily *seva* cleansed the hearts of the king and his sister. Then Nilkanth revealed his divine form to Mahadatt and Mayarani. As a result both the king and his sister were doubly pleased and elated.

Having realised that his mission has been accomplished, Nilkanth made preparations to leave. He took the *mrigcharma*, tied the Shaligram around his neck and took the *kamandal* in his hand, ready to depart. The king and his family were extremely distressed at this. The king and queen prayed, "O! Maharaj! You stayed with us all

these days and blessed us with the knowledge of your divinity and now suddenly where are you going? Even my daughter and others have taken vows inspired by your presence. How can we live without you?"

Nilkanth told him, "O king! I have to go. Many people who want to attain salvation are waiting for me."

But King Mahadatt and his sister insisted upon Nilkanth to stay. So, he put back his things and postponed his departure. But in the dead of night he quietly slipped out of the palace. When the king's sister came to know of this the next morning, she sent horsemen in search of Nilkanth in different directions. By then Nilkanth had covered several kilometres. On catching up with Nilkanth, the horsemen lovingly pleaded with him and brought him back to the palace.

Eventually, through Nilkanth's discourses the royal brother and his sister were liberated from worldy desires. Thus Nilkanth achieved what he wanted to accomplish; and then prepared to depart finally. After staying with Mahadatt for five months, the Brahmachari set out to fulfill his mission.

17. MEETING GOPAL YOGI

Nilkanth walked through the Himalayan forests for nearly a year. The biting cold, heat, rain, hunger, thirst or fierce animals did not deter him. One evening he came to a banyan tree. It was a very old tree with branches all around.

Nilkanth saw an old rishi, sitting on his deer-skin spread on a stone slab under the banyan tree, engrossed in meditation. One of his hands rested on a small staff and the other on his knee. He was sitting in the *swastik* posture. Automatically his eyes opened and his attention was drawn towards Nilkanth. A wave of devotion filled his heart. He ran towards Nilkanth and embraced him.

The rishi was overjoyed when he saw the young celibate. He shed tears of joy and said, "Bhagwan! You kept me waiting for a long time." He was convinced that Purushottam Narayan himself has come to give him *darshan*. The rishi said, "My name is Gopal Yogi. My mind has never been drawn to anyone and my eyes have never opened while in meditation. But today as soon as you came near this tree, my eyes opened. My mind and eyes were enticed by you. Therefore, O Bal Yogi ! Who are you? I have attained perfection in *ashtang yoga*. I shall teach you yoga but please tell me about yourself."

Nilkanth replied, "I am Parabrahm, beyond Atma, Akshar or Brahm. But from the worldly viewpoint, I am the son of a Brahmin. I have been travelling through forests for three years since I left my home. I have performed severe austerities for over two months and have propitiated Suryanarayan. I aspire to accomplish *ashtang yoga*. People



Gopal Yogi teaches yoga to Nilkanth Varni

call me by the name of Nilkanth Varni. Please accept me as your disciple and teach me yoga."

Gopal Yogi was very pleased with this reply. He accepted Nilkanth's request and taught him yoga every morning and evening. Gradually Nilkanth mastered the science of *ashtang yoga*, viz. *yam*, *niyam*, *asan*, *pratyahar*, *pranayam*, *dharana*, *dhyan* and *samadhi*. He also attained the eight-*siddhis*. He also learnt the various yogic exercises like *kunjar*, *dhoti*, *neti* and *basti*. Besides, he mastered the various *vidyas*, viz. *brahmavidya*, *akshividya*, *daharvidya,* etc. He spent a year with Gopal Yogi and mastered the theory and practice of yoga which other yogis could not accomplish in a lifetime.

Nilkanth also served Gopal Yogi with devotion. As Gopal Yogi taught yoga to Nilkanth, he in turn imparted to the yogi the knowledge of his own self. He gave him *Brahmagnan*. He gave Gopal Yogi the *darshan* of Narayan in his own self and redeemed his soul. After performing the crematory rites of Gopal Yogi, Nilkanth resumed his journey.

18. BLESSES THE KING OF NEPAL

After crossing mountains and forests, Nilkanth came to Kathmandu in Nepal in 1796 CE. Prithvinarayan Sahah's grandson Rana Bahadur was the king. His grandfather had expanded the Gorkha kingdom and made Kathmandu the capital. Nilkanth came to Kathmandu to have *darshan* of the Pashupatinath mandir.

The king, Rana Bahadur, was suffering from a chronic disease. He tried his level best to find a cure but did not succeed. He even sought the assistance of *bawas,* sadhus, Brahmins, scholars, priests and others. But there was one problem. Whoever tried to cure the king and failed would be imprisoned by him and subjected to all sorts of tortures. Thus no sadhus came to Kathmandu.

When Nilkanth arrived in Kathmandu a band of *bawas* were accompanying him. At first they were reluctant to go to Kathmandu because of the king's disease and his wicked nature. When the *bawas* told the Varni not to go, he told them, "A sadhu should never be afraid." On Varni's assurance the *bawas* entered Kathmandu. As soon as the king came to know of their arrival he sent his man to call the *mahant*. The *mahant* took the young Brahmachari with him to the king. The monarch received them with due honours in his *darbar*.

The king requested Varni to find a cure for his disease. The young celibate replied, "Your disease is willed by your *karmas* and nothing can cure it. No one can change what God has determined. Therefore, believe whatever misery and pain that comes to you as your fate. Bear it with patience and offer prayers to God. Your wilful ways will not end your misery. Instead you will invite further bondage through such *karmas*." On hearing the soothing message of the young sadhu the king's inner eye opened and he asked for forgiveness and requested Varni to cure him.

The compassionate Nilkanth asked for water and gave a little to the king to drink. The king faithfully drank the consecrated water and by the wish of Nilkanth his stomach pains subsided. The king was tremendously impressed by Nilkanth. He told Varni to ask for something in return. Nilkanth said, "If you want to do a little service then I have only one demand to make, release all the imprisoned sadhus." The king was greatly pleased by Varni's selflessness and released all the imprisoned sadhus. Nilkanth was pleased and blessed the king.

Nilkanth then headed north towards Tibet. There he visited Buddhist monasteries and cast a glance at China. He then returned to Nepal and visited Adivarah *tirth* and came to Sirpur.

19. REDEEMS THE TELANGI BRAHMIN

Nilkanth lived in a garden at Sirpur. Wicked *bawas* had made themselves comfortable in the place and had been camping there for a long time. At that time Sirpur was ruled by a virtuous king called Siddhavallabh. The king was greatly impressed by the *darshan* of Nilkanth. The king asked Varni to stay in his palace but he refused. The king ordered a Brahmachari called Gopaldas to serve Nilkanth.

Gopaldas served the young celibate with devotion. He would prepare and offer different food dishes each day. The king would meet Nilkanth daily and sit on a mat to listen to his discourses.

The b*awas* who were camping in the garden were devotees of goddess Bhairav and ghosts. They frightened the people by resorting to hocus-pocus, by muttering mantras and tying charmed threads, by casting charmed grains of *adad,* by harrassing them with their occult powers or by hypnosis. The *bawas* burned with jealousy because of the king's reverence for Nilkanth.

One day, because of their jealousy for Nilkanth, a *bawa* cast a spell on Gopaldas and made him unconscious. He then told the king, "Now you tell the Varni, whom you worship, to revive him if he has the power." Nilkanth merely passed his hand over the unconscious Gopaldas and made him get up.

Gopaldas sat at Nilkanth's feet. The *bawas* were greatly surprised and became speechless with wonder. Some approached the Varni to become his followers. This displeased some of the *bawas*, and they thus cast spells upon them. At this some other *bawas* cast spells at them. Consequently some of them fainted. Nilkanth revived all of them through his powers and told them to lead virtuous lives.

At that time a Telangi Brahmin arrived in Sirpur. He was very greedy. Out of avarice, he acquired an elephant and a *kalpurush* as a gift from the king. The Brahmin was very handsome and fair complexioned, but when he accepted the gift out of greed, his whole body turned black and ugly. All the Brahmins began to censure and ridicule him. The Telangi Brahmin, therefore, became very unhappy and cried in despair.

With tears in his eyes, he came to Nilkanth and prostrated at his feet. He confessed his greed. Nilkanth felt pity for him. He placed his hand on the Brahmin's head and blessed him. The Brahmin became fair-complexioned and handsome. He bowed to Nilkanth and became his disciple. Nilkanth advised him to give up greed. At this, King Siddhavallabh developed more affection and respect for Nilkanth. The Brahmachari inspired the glory of his divine form in the king's heart and as he departed the king was pained. Nilkanth told him, "If you cherish my form in your heart then I shall always be with you."

After celebrating Annakut and Kartik Purnima festival, he left Sirpur and headed towards Assam.

20. DEFEAT OF PIBEK

From Sirpur Nilkanth arrived at the pilgrim place of Kamakshi. There is a big Kamakshi mandir in the town. As he walked through, it appeared as if the young celibate, with his dimunitive form, had cast a spell on people all around. Several aspirants were greatly attracted by his personality. This produced jealousy in the minds of the *bawas* who felt that their hold on people would weaken because of the young sadhu. They incited a wicked Brahmin called Pibek, a devotee of Kali, to challenge and defeat Nilkanth. Early in his life this Brahmin was very virtuous. But once he got into bad

company he became vicious and corrupt. He began to eat meat and fish and drank *bhang* and liquor. He was a devotee of goddess Kali. He used to meditate for the appeasement of ghosts and Bhairav. He went to cremation grounds at night to learn black magic. He used abusive language and frightened people. He harassed them by practising hocus-pocus and offering them charms to wear. With his forehead besmeared with large vermilion marks, with a large tuft of hair, his eyes large and bloodshot and physique as strong as that of a wrestler, he used to threaten and intimidate one and all. He extorted money from everybody. He forced sadhus, *jogis* and *jatis* to forsake their religious sect by breaking their *kanthis* and forcibly made them his disciples. He also made them worship ghosts and Bhairav.

Nilkanth had lodged in a garden outside the village. Some *siddha* yogis were also camping in the same garden. Pibek came to the garden to defeat Nilkanth. He was accompanied by several half-naked men and women who were without shame. They came to the garden dancing weirdly. He saw many *siddha* yogis sitting there. Enlarging his bloodshot eyeballs, he rushed towards the yogis.

On seeing Pibek, they began to tremble as they were mortally afraid of him. The yogis got up and were about to leave. Nilkanth told them in a quiet tone, “Why are you afraid of this man who worships evil gods and goddesses? Without Paramatma’s power nobody in this universe can kill anybody. So don’t be afraid. Don’t even look at him.”

Pibek was enraged by Nilkanth’s calm composure. People told Varni of Pibek’s powers and advised him not to infuriate the man. But Nilkanth was calm and resolute. Then Pibek uttered some mantra and threw *adad* grains on a banyan tree which withered away instantly. The *bawas*’ fright increased further. They put their hands on their

kanthis and tried to break them.

Nilkanth said, "Do not rub off your *tilak* marks and do not break your Vaishnavi *kanthis*. It would be sinful if you break the Vaishnavi *kanthis* of tulsi beads. Do not be afraid of Pibek at all. Let him practise his devilry first on me. If something happens to me then you may surrender to him." Nilkanth then challenged the wicked Brahmin.

Pibek was thoroughly roused on hearing this. He said, "Your time has come."

Nilkanth said, "Do what you can. I am sitting here." So saying Nilkanth sat cross-legged in front of Pibek. Behind him all the yogis sat down. In order to frighten Nilkanth, Pibek muttered some mantras and threw a handful of *adad* grains on the ground with great force. Clouds of smoke issued from that spot. Kalbhairav and Batuk emerged from the smoke but could not go near Nilkanth and stood at a short distance from him. Pibek muttered many mantras, but the ghosts did not move towards Nilkanth. On the contrary, they began to beat Pibek with their trident and crashed him to the ground. Pibek started bleeding from his mouth. This incensed him all the more and he invoked the presence of Hanumanji. When Hanumanji appeared and saw Nilkanth, he bowed to him and struck a blow with his fist on Pibek's head. "You want me to fight with God! I will kill you today," roared Hanumanji. And he beat Pibek so severely that he vomited blood and fell unconscious on the ground with the thud of a crashing tree.

On seeing this, some of Pibek's disciples and relatives prayed to Nilkanth to revive him and bring him back to life. Nilkanth felt pity for them. He looked at Pibek, whereupon he regained consciousness. His whole body was aching and he could not speak. Not a single bone was intact as his body had been beaten to pulp. With



Batuk Bhairav attacks Pibek

great difficulty he dragged himself to where Nilkanth was sitting and caught hold of his feet in abject surrender. He asked for forgive-ness. Everyone was surprised at the change of Pibek's heart.

Nilkanth said, "Pibek, he who is a true *siddha* does not frighten others. He who has sought refuge in Paramatma is not afraid of anything. Your magical powers have been reduced to ashes by Paramatma's powers."

Nilkanth put his hand on Pibek's head and he experienced divine bliss. He initiated him into the Vaishnav fold and asked him to adopt moral and peaceful ways. Pibek's disciples were also administered the Vaishnav *mantra* and made to wear the tulsi *kanthi* and put on the *tilak*. Nilkanth blessed them all and having uplifted them from their evil ways, he resumed his journey.

21. UPLIFT OF 900,000 YOGIS

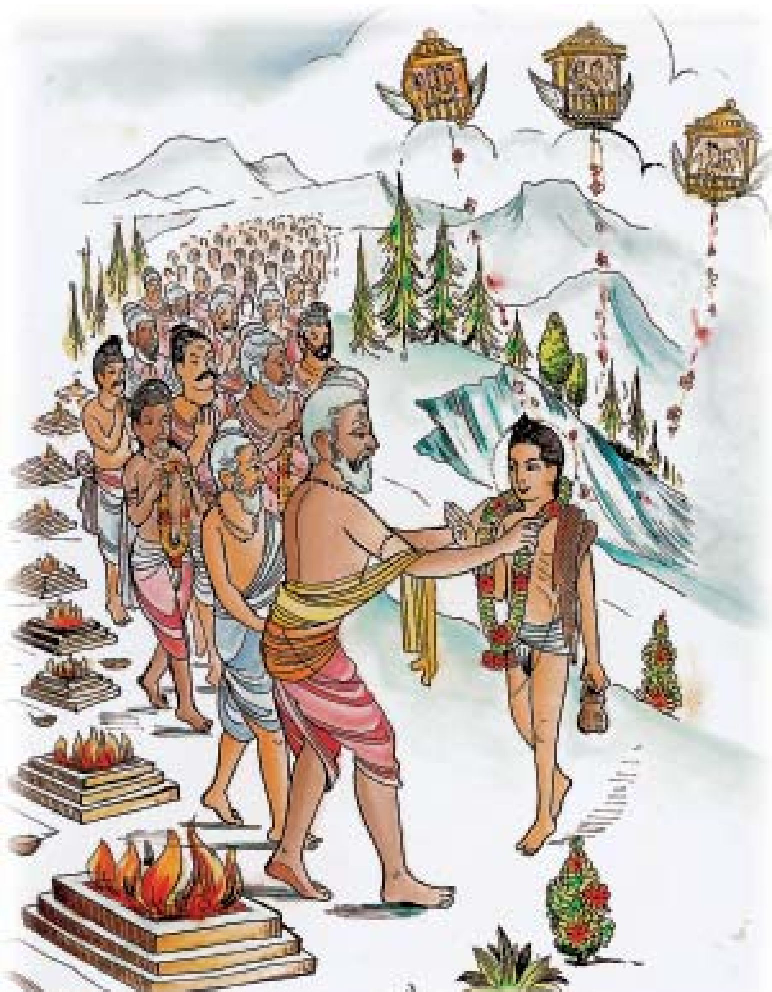
Proceeding from Kamakshi, Nilkanth approached the Navlakha* mountain. Nine hundred thousand yogis were living on the mountain. They were all *siddha* yogis and had been performing penance for thousands of years. They had resplendent forms while praying to God which could not be seen by ordinary mortals. Every morning they performed sacrifices, took their bath and performed *sandhya*. Each one of them had a separate water-cistern to bathe in and *yagnakund* for performing sacrifice. Thus there were 900,000 small water cisterns and 900,000 sacrificial altars. Day and night the *siddhas* remained engrossed in prayers to God. They were emaciated. They had thick, matted hair on their heads and wore long beards, white as cotton-wool.

One morning, when all the *siddhas* were seated in meditation, a divine voice was heard from the sky. In a sweet tone it said, "Purushottam Narayan, for whose *darshan* you have been performing penance for years, will himself come and give you his *darshan*. He is manifest now on earth. He will himself give his *darshan* to you and redeem you all."

On hearing the heavenly voice, the *siddhas* were exhilarated. They all felt happy. Peace pervaded their

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* According to the Sampraday's scriptures it seems as if it is a huge mountain range. Since 900,000 yogis were residing on it, it has become popular as Navlakha mountain in the Sampraday. Geographically however, no such name is found on the map. There is a possibility of it being in eastern India in the state of Meghalaya near Shillong. Since Nilkanth descended from the Navlakha mountain to arrive straight at Balwakund there is reason for inferring that the mountain ranges could be somewhere between Bangladesh, Mizoram and Tripura state.



Nilkanth Varni on Navalakha mountain

hearts. The *siddhas* were engulfed in joy, and started preparations for the reception of Nilkanth. Some began to collect fruits, while others began to weave garlands of flowers for him.

Continuing his tour, Nilkanth arrived at the foot of the

Navalakha mountain. Then he started climbing the mountain. Again the *siddhas* heard the heavenly voice, "Tomorrow at dawn you will all have the *darshan* of Purushottam Narayan in the form of Nilkanth Varni. By his *darshan* alone you will all attain redemption and reach Akshardham."

It was dawn. Nilkanth Varni reached the top of the mountain. The yogis experienced bliss at his *darshan*. They all honoured him, gave him a warm welcome by placing garlands round his neck. The deities showered flowers from the sky. The whole atmosphere was sanctified by the chanting of Vedic verses.

Nilkanth assumed 900,000 forms. He offered oblations at every sacrificial altar. He drank water from every cistern and thus consecrated the water. The 900,000 yogis kept Nilkanth with them for three days and pleased him by their service. They sang praises of Nilkanth from the core of their hearts.

They all prayed, "O Nilkanth! Since you have given us your *darshan*, kindly be merciful and reside permanently in our hearts. It is our humble request, O Lord of Akshar, that your *murti* does not disappear from our hearts." On hearing this prayer Nilkanth said, "So be it." Then the yogis bade him farewell with heavy hearts.

Nilkanth walked on. On the way he came to Balwakund. Flames eternally come out from the waters of this spa and from the stones nearby. After visiting this place, sanctifying the birthplace of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu at Navdweep and visiting Shantipur, the seat of the Gaudiya sect, Nilkanth reached Gangasagar, the confluence of the Ganga and the sea. He bathed there and spent three days at Makar Sankranti *mela*. Then he crossed the sea by boat and reached Kapil ashram.

22. RELIGIOUS PREACHING

Kapil Ashram, where Kapil Muni had performed austerities for several years, was a beautiful, secluded spot. Its rural setting was ideal for performing austerities. Even today, many genuine aspirants have the *darshan* of Kapil Muni, who propounded the Sankhya philosophy. At the arrival of Nilkanth, Kapil Muni came in person and welcomed him. The Brahmachari liked the ashram and he decided to meditate.

After a bath, the young celibate sat in *dhyan.* It lasted for six days. So absorbed was he that it made the *devas* anxious. They were terribly upset. They felt that with Nilkanth immersed in *dhyan,* the aim of his earthly mission to root out unrighteousness and evil on earth would be forgotten. It seemed that mother earth was praying before him to relieve her of her burden of sin.

After six days when Nilkanth opened his eyes, he gave a firm commitment to re-establish *dharma* on this earth. He then bid farewell to the place.

Nilkanth then travelled towards the south. By evening he reached a village. A few persons were sitting in the village square. Nilkanth asked them, "Is there any place in your village for *jogis* and *jatis* to stay?"

One of the villagers replied, "There is a Ramji mandir for the mendicants opposite the house of the village Bania. All sadhus and ascetics are allowed to stay there. You may also go and stay there."

Nilkanth went to the Ramji mandir. The *bawas* gave him a place to stay. Nilkanth took a bath and sat in the courtyard of the mandir.

In the evening, *arti* was performed in the mandir. Thereafter the recitation of the Ramayan began. Men and women came from the village and gathered to listen to the

story. Nilkanth did not like men and women sitting together in the mandir. When the recital was over, people began to disperse after touching the feet of the *bawas*. Some women came to touch the feet of Nilkanth also, but he got up and went away into his room. Then, some women began to massage the legs of the *bawas* and to render other services to them. Nilkanth did not like this either. He admonished the *bawas* saying, "You recite the Ramayan, but why don't you follow *dharma*? A sadhu cannot deliver religious discourses to women. A sadhu who has renounced the world should renounce women and wealth."

On hearing these words, the *bawas* became very angry and asked, "Who are you, little kid, to advise us? Get out of here; otherwise we shall beat you and drive you out."

Nilkanth immediately disappeared. The *bawas* wondered as to how the boy could have disappeared through closed doors. Nilkanth reappeared, seated on the verandah, at the Bania's house opposite the mandir.

At that time Hanumanji, appeared before Nilkanth. When he found that the irreligious *bawas* had driven Nilkanth out of the mandir, he bowed to Nilkanth, took a thick stick and went into the mandir. There he began to beat the *bawas* and their women disciples. The *bawas* were thoroughly battered. They asked, "Who are you? Why are you beating us without any offence? What is our offence?"

Hanumanji replied, "Why did you drive out Nilkanth Brahmachari from here, even though he has not committed any offence? Nilkanth is God incarnate. Why did you drive him out of this mandir of Ramchandraji? Now go and fall at his feet and seek his forgiveness. I shall free you only when you bring Nilkanth honourably back to this mandir; otherwise I shall kill all of you today."

The *bawas* said, "We will do as you command, but please let us go. Please do tell us who you are."



Hanumanji beats the bawas who had insulted Nilkanth

Then Hanumanji said, "I am Hanumanji, the son of Anjana. I am a servant of Nilkanth."

The *bawas* asked the women to leave the mandir. They went to the verandah of the Bania's house, apologised to Nilkanth and pleading guilty for their misdeeds said, "We are sorry, we could not recognise you. Now we know that you are the incarnation of Ramchandraji. From today we shall not touch women and wealth. We shall do as you command but please relieve us from the clutches of your servant Hanumanji."

Nilkanth forgave them all and gestured to Hanumanji who disappeared into the sky. The *bawas* then respectfully brought Nilkanth back to the mandir. They entertained him for two days in the mandir with their hospitality and delicious food. Nilkanth gave a code of moral conduct to all the *bawas* and then set out on his onward journey.

23. NILKANTH AT THE HOUSE OF JAIRAMDAS

As he was walking constantly, Nilkanth naturally felt fatigued. The sun was about to set. A village was visible at a short distance and the young celibate walked towards it.

There were two *bawas* in the village. One of them was the head of the local mandir and the other a householder-*bawa*. Nilkanth stayed at the mandir for the night. The head of the mandir experienced peace in the presence of Nilkanth and thus requested him to stay for two to three days.

The householder-*bawa* had a son and two daughters. Both the sisters used to go to the mandir to learn Tulsi Ramayan from this *bawa*. The *bawa* read and explained the Ramayan to them daily in the morning and evening. Whenever the girls did not follow anything, they would ask the *bawa* its meaning and he would explain to them. If the question was difficult, he would give a confusing answer. Nilkanth heard all this silently.

One day when the *bawa* was explaining the Ramayan, the girls asked a question which baffled the *bawa*. He did not know the answer. Nilkanth then intervened and asked the *bawa* if he could give the explanation. The *bawa* agreed. Nilkanth answered several questions one by one. The girls went home pleased with the answers.

On reaching home, they related the whole incident to their parents and said, "Nilkanth is a child celibate. He is very brilliant. He is God. Let us invite him to our house for dinner." The father was pleased to hear this. He went to the mandir and with great persuasion brought Nilkanth to dine at his Krishna mandir. The wife of the Brahmin was a very devout woman. She prepared delicious food. She also served milk, cream, butter, curds and sugar to Nilkanth.

When Nilkanth finished eating, the Brahmin requested

him to stay at his house. He said, “This is my son Jairamdas. I want him to serve you.” He repeated this request several times. Responding to the deep feelings of the Brahmin and his wife, Nilkanth stayed at their house for a few days. Pleased with their devotion, Nilkanth showed them his divine form.

24. REDEMPTION OF JAMBUVAN

Jairamdas became extremely fond of Nilkanth and was always ready to serve him with great devotion day and night. Every morning and evening Nilkanth would teach him the *shastras* and yoga. Everyday Jairam would bring lotus fruits for the young Brahmachari. One day Nilkanth asked, “Jairam, where do you get these lotus fruits from?” Jairam replied, “There is a lake. My friend Krishna Tamboli and I get the lotus fruits from that lake.”

Nilkanth said, “Is that so? Will you show me the lake? I want to eat fresh lotus-fruits. Come, we shall sail in the lake and enjoy it there.” Jairam was very happy and agreed to the proposal.

The sun was setting. Nilkanth and Jairamdas reached the shore of the lake. Krishna Tamboli kept a raft ready. The three of them got onto the raft and Jairamdas began rowing. A cool breeze was blowing. Tamboli plucked lotus plants from the water and offered the fruits to Nilkanth, while talking.

Tamboli said, “Varniraj! Do you see those trees on the opposite shore? The forest there is full of ferocious animals. At night the roar of lions and tigers can be heard even from my house. No one ever ventures out there.” Tamboli went on talking and Nilkanth listened to him quietly. After some time Nilkanth said, “Give me the oar. Let me steer the raft for some time.” With these words, he took the oar from Jairam and began to row the raft.

Soon the wind changed direction. Nilkanth increased the speed of the raft which began to sail swiftly towards the opposite shore. Krishna Tamboli and Jairamdas held their breath because they were heading for the forest. In a short while they reached the opposite shore. Nilkanth got on to the shore. Jairam shouted, "Nilkanth! Don't go there."

Tamboli said, "Varniraj, it is not safe to go into the forest. There is great danger from wild animals. Besides, it being evening time, the beasts will come to the lake to drink water." But Nilkanth would not listen. Although they did not like it, Jairam and Krishna Tamboli got down. Nilkanth began walking towards the forest.

As Tamboli shouted not to advance further, Nilkanth went deeper into the forest. The roar of wild animals made the boys' hearts throb with fear. Then suddenly they heard loud screams coming from a distance. Tamboli and Jairamdas began to tremble. The dry leaves on the ground rustled. The birds flew from the branches. Two monkeys noisily climbed up to higher branches of the trees. There was some commotion in the opposite thicket. A black, ferocious bear came charging towards Nilkanth.

"Nilkanth," cried Tamboli and Jairam, and climbed up a tree. Their hearts throbbed vigorously, beads of perspiration formed on their foreheads and their throats went dry. Both sat on the tree like statues. They thought that the bear would tear Nilkanth to pieces. At that time Nilkanth cast a glance at the bear and it calmed down. It stood on its hind legs, came near Nilkanth, bent down and bowed to him. Tears began to roll down its cheeks. Nilkanth helped the bear stand up, blessed it and said, "You may go." The bear bowed again to Nilkanth and disappeared in the thicket.

Nilkanth shouted for Tamboli. Tamboli and Jairamdas came down from the tree, still trembling. Nilkanth said,



Nilkanth redeems Jambuvan

"Let us go home."

All three returned to the shore, got on the raft and began to row speedily. Then Tamboli asked Nilkanth, "Varniraj! How is it that the bear became quiet when it came to you? Why was it weeping? Who was it? Why did it bow to you before it returned?"

Nilkanth said, "Its name is Jambuvan. It had served Shri Krishna but because of doubts it had been wandering hither and thither. Now it will be redeemed. It will shed its body and be born as a devotee. He will then come into my

contact and attain Akshardham." Jairamdas and Krishna Tamboli were greatly surprised. They arrived at the opposite shore of the lake.

Tamboli escorted Nilkanth up to the house of Jairam. Both Jairam and Tamboli related the story of the bear to the members of their respective families and ended by saying, "Nilkanth is Bhagwan Krishna himself."

This story spread throughout the village and to nearby villages also. Large crowds of people flocked to the home of Jairam in the morning and evening for the *darshan* of Nilkanth who became renowned all around.

25. NILKANTH LEAVES JAIRAM'S HOUSE

It was early morning. The day had not yet dawned. Nilkanth awoke and sat up on his bed and thought that his mission with Jairamdas, his family and the bear was over. So he decided to leave. He looked around. Everybody was fast asleep. Gently he took up his *kamandal* and went to the door. The door opened automatically. Nilkanth left the house of Jairamdas and walked away.

The day dawned. Jairam's mother got up and she immediately noticed that Nilkanth was not in his bed. She thought Nilkanth might have perhaps gone for a bath. She sent someone in search of him at the lake, but Nilkanth was not there either. Jairam and his father went around every street of the village to search for him. They searched at the village square, in the bazaar, in the forest, in the garden but they could not find him. Jairam's parents became sad and they did not eat anything. The whole village wore a forlorn look. Everyone wondered, "Have we done anything wrong? Why has he left us like this?"

Jairam's mother felt extremely uneasy and told him to get ready to search for Nilkanth. She gave him some food and money for the journey and said, "Go and search for Nilkanth

and bring him back from wherever he is. I can- not live without him. Beg for his pardon if we have made any mistake, but bring him back. Nilkanth is our God."

Jairamdas left in search of Nilkanth.

26. REUNION WITH NILKANTH

When Nilkanth was briskly walking in the direction of Jagannathpuri he heard someone calling, "Oh Nilkanth Varni." He turned back to see who was calling him.

It was Jairamdas who came running, panting and shouting. After twenty days of searching he had at last found Nilkanth. Seeing Jairam, Nilkanth stopped. Jairamdas fell at the feet of Nilkanth. He beseeched, "O Brahmachariji! Please forgive our faults. Oh kind one, please excuse our mistakes. Come back to our house. I shall not allow you to proceed any further. My parents are bewailing. They have stopped eating. They are crying all day long. The whole village is sad. My sisters and Krishna Tamboli have become almost mad. Please hurry up, and return to my house. I shall not leave you alone." Nilkanth quietened him and gave him a lot of advice. It was only then that Jairam calmed down. He said, "Jairam come with me on a pilgrimage to Jagannathpuri."

Because Jairamdas had a lot of affection for his family he was hesitant at first, but then he agreed to accompany Nilkanth to Jagannathpuri. Whilst travelling through a dense forest Jairamdas experiened the divinity of Nilkanth. They crossed the sea and reached Bhubaneshwar. There they had *darshan* of Mahadev and after three days they reached Janakpur.

27. NILKANTH IN JAGANNATHPURI

Nilkanth arrived on the banks of Indradumyna lake. The famous mandir of Jagannathpuri is only a couple of

kilometres from the Indradumyna lake.

Jagannathpuri is a very holy pilgrim place. A big mandir has been built there on the sacred ashes of Shri Krishna. Thousands of pilgrims throng to this place for daily *darshan*. Nilkanth used to have the *darshan* of the deity, Jagannathji, everyday and sit in meditation before the Garud pillar in the mandir. He would listen to the discourse on the Shrimad Bhagwat with devotion.

The priest was happy to have Nilkanth's *darshan*. He would give him the food offered to Shri Jagannathji. Each day the young Brahmachari would bathe in the sea and sit in meditation under a banyan tree outside the mandir. He would go to Chandan Sarovar and perform yoga. People were greatly attracted by his lofty spiritual state. It soon became known that a great young Brahmachari had arrived in Puri. The king came to know of this and he felt blessed by the *darshan* of Nilkanth. He used to visit the Varni daily and listen to his discourses and learn the essence of spirituality. On seeing the extraordinary powers of Nilkanth, the king accepted him as his guru.

There was, however, much trouble from evil people. A large band of naked *bawas* lived by the Indradumyna lake. They deceived the masses, indulged in illicit sex and remained intoxicated in addictions. They wielded weapons and quarelled with each other and burned with envy on seeing the devotion of the king, pilgrims and the local people towards Nilkanth.

Soon the festival of Rath Yatra arrived in Jagannathpuri. This festival is celebrated by pulling the chariot with the *murti* of the deities in it. Even the king pulls the chariot on this day. The king thus placed Nilkanth on a beautifully decorated chariot and he and his citizens pulled the chariot on the streets of Jagannathpuri. On seeing this the *bawas* were filled with hate and anger.

One day Nilkanth was meditating by the banks of the Indradumyna lake. A *bawa* came and shook him, “Hey boy! Go and pluck some spinach leaves.”

But Nilkanth did not wish to do so.

The *bawa* ordered him again, “Go and pluck some spinach leaves.”

Nilkanth replied, “Since there is a *jiva* in it, I will not pluck it.” The *bawa* became terribly angry at Nilkanth’s answer. He unsheathed his sword and rushed to strike Varni. But Nilkanth remained unruffled.

Jairamdas was in the service of Nilkanth. On seeing this he started screaming with fright. The sudden commotion attracted the attention of the other *bawas*. They came running to the spot and stood in defense of Nilkanth. Soon there were two opposing sides. At the sound of trumpets and drums the battle began. By then Jairamdas had rushed



The bawas started fighting among themselves

to the city of Jagannathpuri and announced, "Help, help! Nilkanth's life is in danger."

When the king came to hear of this, he immediately led his armed soldiers to attack the *bawas*, and a fierce battle ensued. Thousands of *bawas* were killed and those that survived ran away.

The king came to Nilkanth. The young Brahmachari was still absorbed in meditation. When Nilkanth awoke, the king requested him to come to his palace but Varni refused. Nilkanth blessed the king and departed from Janakpur and Jagannathpuri. Nilkanth had stayed for ten months and perceived the devotion and deception of the priest of Jagannath mandir. Due to Nilkanth's stay righteousness prevailed and evil was destroyed.

28. DESTRUCTION OF ASURAS IN MANASPUR

Nilkanth came to Manaspur. He stayed on its outskirts in the king's garden. The gardener used to weave garlands of flowers every morning and evening and place them round the Brahmachari's neck. He also offered him fresh fruits and edible food.

On hearing the greatness of Nilkanth from the gardener, the king, Satradharma, went to the garden for his *darshan*. The *darshan* gave peace of mind to the king. Thereafter, accompanied by his queen, he used to go everyday to hear the sermons of Nilkanth. One day Nilkanth described to them the importance of worshipping Vishnu and shaligram. The king therefore wished to have a shaligram.

A group of ignorant sadhus was camping in the garden. The king approached the *mahant* for a shaligram. The *mahant* was infuriated and reacted, "Is it something to be asked for? Do you know you have to perform its proper *puja* daily?"

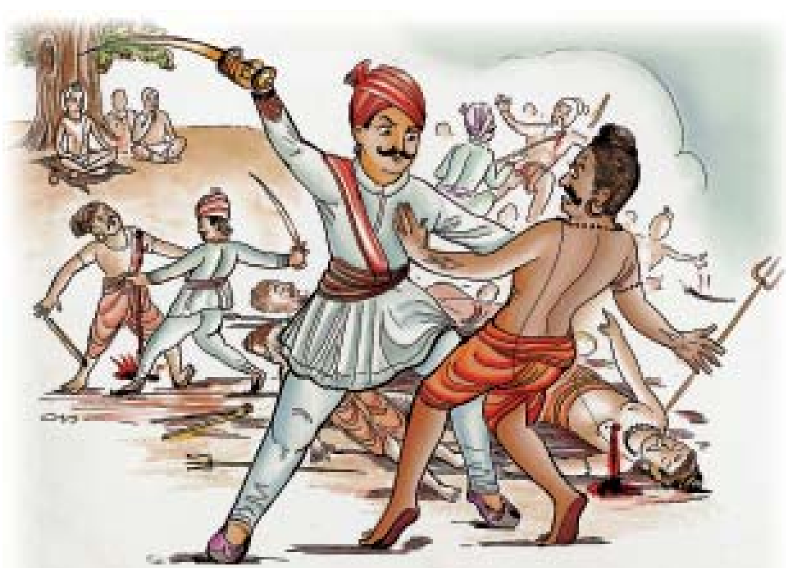
The king had seen how the senseless *bawas* performed

puja. He, however, kept quiet. He came and told everything to Nilkanth. The next day Jairamdas was directed by Nilkanth to approach the *mahant* for a shaligram. The latter was terribly annoyed and picked up his trident to kill Jairamdas. He reported the matter to Nilkanth.

That night all the shaligrams fell into the Gandki river as willed by Nilkanth. The following day the *mahant* launched a vigorous search but to no avail. The *mahant* thought that either the king had stolen the shaligrams or Nilkanth's servant Jairamdas had taken them away. Thus the *bawas* were angry with Nilkanth.

Since Jairamdas had gone out, the *mahant* and the *bawas* thought it was a golden opportunity to kill Nilkanth. They started pelting him with stones, but not a single stone hit him. Meanwhile Jairamdas returned. He was frightened by the scene and immediately rushed to the king.

On hearing of the incident, the king and his soldiers



The king's army slaughtered the bawas

rushed to the garden. Fighting broke out between the king's troops and the *bawas*. The *bawas* were all killed in the fight. Nilkanth showed his true divine form to the king and bade him farewell. On the way, Nilkanth preached to Jairam. He asked Jairam to become a sadhu. But he would not listen. "Return to my house. My parents are waiting for you," was all that he would say.

In the end, Nilkanth made Jairam return home. He told Jairam, "If you are in sorrow, remember me. If you want to become a sadhu come searching for me in Kathiawad and I will meet you there."

Jairam caught hold of Nilkanth's feet and with a sad heart set out for home. Nilkanth took the route to Rameshwar and proceeded towards Venkatadri.

29. REDEMPTION OF RATA BASHIYA

Nilkanth walked on. On the way he came across a thick forest. The forest was pitch dark even during the day, as the light of the sun could not penetrate through the trees. Nilkanth walked through the forest. In the midst of a narrow meandering path in the forest, there lay a demon, like a python. His snore could be heard from a distance. It was so loud that it frightened the people.

As Nilkanth was walking along the path, he came near the demon and kicked his head. The demon at once woke up, stood on his legs and roared, "Who are you?" But on seeing Nilkanth, he immediately bowed to him and with folded hands prayed, "O God, please redeem me. I have been reduced to this wretched state by the curse of a Brahmin." He then began to relate his story, "I was a pious and religious king of the Telang region. Two Brahmins named Jaidev and Mukunddev lived in my kingdom. Both were learned, powerful and had high achievements to their credit. The one-year-old daughter of Jaidev was engaged to

the three-year-old son of Mukunddev. The daughter grew up and so did the son. But suddenly Mukunddev's son was afflicted with smallpox and he became blind. Hence, Jaidev



"Today your gracious foot has touched my head. This will uplift me."

broke off the engagement of his daughter to the son of Mukunddev. He returned all the customary gifts of clothes and ornaments. Hence Mukunddev got very angry and came to me for justice. I studied the relevant scriptures and pronounced my judgement, 'In the event if either the bride or the bridegroom become disabled, the engagement can be broken off.'

"Hearing this judgement of mine, Mukunddev was enraged. He said to me, 'The family tradition and customs are more important than the scriptures. You must, therefore call upon the bride's father to get her married to my son.' I firmly replied to him that I could not pronounce a judgment contrary to the commands of the scriptures.

"So Mukunddev cursed me indignantly, 'You will become a demon within nine months.' On hearing this, Jaidev, taking my side, gave me this boon, 'Don't worry about the curse, God himself will meet you. You will have the privilege of his service and a place in his divine abode.' Within nine months I died and since then I have been living here as a demon. I eat whatever birds or animals I can get hold of. Once I could not get anything to eat for seven days. At that time a young Brahmin was passing through the forest. I caught hold of him and was about to devour him when he spoke, 'I am the only source of livelihood to my old parents and two sisters. I am going to fix up the engagement of my sisters, so please let me go. If you do not let me go, you will have to lie here inert like a python.'

"I did not listen to him and devoured him. Since then I have been lying in this forest like an inert, lazy python. Today your gracious foot has touched my head. This will uplift me." With these words the demon fell at the feet of Nilkanth.

Nilkanth blessed him and said, "You will get redemption. You will be reborn in Kathiawad and will be

associated with me and render service to me. You will get your ultimate deliverance and attain my Akshardham."

After blessing him thus, Nilkanth proceeded further. With this, the demon shed his mortal body. In accordance with the blessings of Nilkanth, he was reborn in the Kathi caste and family of Bashiya in the village of Jetpur in Sorath. He was named Rato. People called him Rato Bashiyo. He served Shriji Maharaj, and was deeply devoted to him. He inspired faith amongst the people by relating the story of his previous birth. Shriji Maharaj also demonstrated affection for him.

30. UNGRATEFUL SEVAKRAM

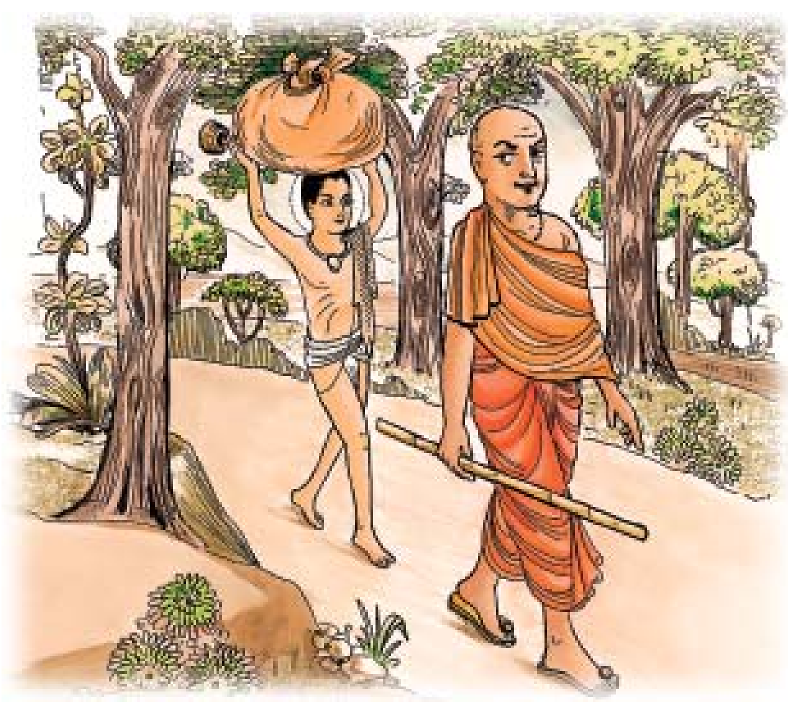
From Venkatadri, Nilkanth took the road to Kanchipuram. Nilkanth met a sadhu called Sevakram on the way. He had studied the *Shrimad Bhagwat* and was a pundit in Sanskrit. Nilkanth was exhilarated to hear the verses of Gopika Geet from Sevakram. Nilkanth was greatly interested in *Bhagwat*. Sevakram merely gave discourses on the *Bhagwat*, but by nature he was ungrateful. He had a thousand gold coins with him, but had no servant to serve him. Once he was struck with acute dysentery. He had frequent motions, and blood passed with the stools. It was very painful. He could not even walk and was, therefore, depressed. He cried because of his pain and helplessness. Nilkanth comforted him and said, "Don't worry, I shall serve you."

There was a banyan tree in a banana garden. Nilkanth prepared a bed of banana leaves under the tree for Sevakram to rest and sleep. He washed his soiled clothes, prepared and served him meals everyday. Sevakram would give money to Nilkanth to buy food provisions like sugar, ghee, rice, etc, only to suffice for himself. Everyday Nilkanth cooked food for him whereas for himself he would have to go to the neighbouring village to beg alms and eat

whatever he received. Sometimes he did not get any alms and had to go without food. Sometimes he would have to fast for two days running, but Sevakram would not give him any money. He did not even have the courtesy to ask him to dine with him.

For two months Nilkanth served him and when he got well they both proceeded towards Rameshwar. On the way Sevakram would have Nilkanth carry his luggage weighing 20 kilogrammes. Nilkanth himself did not have even a handkerchief's weight of luggage; and still he carried Sevakram's bundle. Sevakram drank and digested more than a pound of ghee every day, but did not care for Nilkanth. He merely extracted work from him like a slave.

Realising the ungratefulness and lack of devotion in



Nilkanth carries Sevakram's luggage

Sevakram, Nilkanth left him. One who does not appreciate a favour or a good turn is an ungrateful wretch. One who merely exploits his servant and does not take care of his food and clothing is an ungrateful person. An ungrateful person is considered to be a great sinner. Sevakram was such an ungrateful person.

On the way Nilkanth visited Kanchipuram, Chingalpet and came to the river Kaveri. He bathed in the Kaveri and went to Kumbakon. There every 12 years a Kumbh Mela is held. He did *darshan* of Kumbheshwar Mahadev and had a dip in Mahamagham Sarovar. He gave *darshan* to all in the Kumbh Mela.

From there Nilkanth went to Srirangkshetra. After bathing in the Kaveri-Ganga, he came to the huge Srirang mandir. It was here that Ramanand Swami was given Vaishnav *diksha* in a dream by Ramanujacharya. The mandir also has a four-armed *murti* of Srirang seated on Adishesh. Nilkanth had observed that in the pilgrim places the priests and gurus had strayed from the path of devotion and adopted a life of material indulgence. Out of this subtle observance, Nilkanth's resolve to establish a path free from such weaknesses grew all the more strong.

From here Nilkanth travelled to Mannargudi. People believe this town to be the Ayodhya and Dwarka of the south. Nilkanth went to the ancient mandir of Bhagwan Shri Rajgopal for *darshan* and then took the road to Devipattan.

In South India, Devipattan marks the beginning of the *setubandh*. Nilkanth arrived in Devipattan, where Shri Ram had worshipped the nine *grahas.* There is also a mandir dedicated to Venkateshwar, which Nilkanth had *darshan* of.

31. BHAGWANDAS HAS DARSHAN OF SACRED FOOT-MARKS

Before arriving in Devipattan Nilkanth came to a

village. It was noon time. So he stopped to rest under a tree, on the bank of a river.

The village was not far from this place. One Bhagwandas Bhavsar lived there. His aged mother was very pious and a great devotee of Shri Krishna. Everyday she asked her son Bhagwandas to go in search of God. She believed that they would find God if they searched for him, and, when found, should invite him to their house.

Today, since morning, she insistently said to Bhagwandas, "If you simply work at home and on the farm, you will not find God. Leave all this and set out in search of God." But Bhagwandas did not listen to her. He went away to his farm.

At noon Bhagwandas returned home for his meal. His mother had kept a box containing foodstuffs and a bundle of clothes ready for him. Bhagwandas washed his hands and feet and then sat down for lunch. His mother, while serving him food, repeated, "You shall not go to the farm today. Look, here is your bundle of clothes and the box of foodstuffs. And here are one hundred gold coins. Finish your lunch quickly, and then start at once. Search for God at every holy place and on the bank of every river. Look out for him in jungles and gardens, in caves and ravines. Go to the Himalayas and search for him. Do not come back without bringing him with you. If you return without him, your devout father will lose face. I shall not admit you to this house if you return without him."

One hearing this, Bhagwandas softened. He said, "Yes mother, I shall go today in search of God. But please tell me how I can identify him? If I come across him in person, how should I recognise him ?"

The old mother answered confidently, "Oh, that is very simple. God has, in all, sixteen foot-marks, seven on his left foot and nine on his right foot. His body does

not cast a shadow. If one holds a lamp in front of him when it is dark and the light passes through his body as if it were transparent, then rest assured that he is God himself. Do not leave him. Request him, persuade him, pray to him, appease him, but bring him home."

On listening to this dialogue the wife of Bhagwandas said, "You are going away in search of God, but you alone are my God. If you cannot find God till the end of your life, all that I shall have to do is to wait for you."

On hearing this the old mother laughed. She pacified her, "Silly girl, why are you worried? If we have faith, God will be found within a fortnight. Pray to God that your husband and the Supreme God may meet us very soon."

Bhagwandas, too, was now enthused. He assured his wife, "Yes, yes, I shall certainly find God. See what paramount faith our mother has! If her devotion is true, if your chastity is true, and if my faith is true, the Divine will surely be found within a fortnight. Do not, therefore, worry for me. I shall soon come back." And so saying and respectfully touching the feet of his mother, Bhagwandas stepped out of the house.

Bhagwandas blindly walked on. When he had walked about ten to twelve miles, he came to a river. The sun was about to set. Bhagwandas thought, "Let me cross the river and stay for the night in the village on the other side. Tomorrow morning I shall resume my search."

So he went to the bank of the river, paid the fare to the boatman and got into the boat. The wind filled the sails. The boat sailed off speedily towards the other bank. Within a short time Bhagwandas reached the other bank. He got out of the boat, walked a few steps and then stopped. He thought to himself, "Where shall I pass the night here?"

At that very moment somebody shouted, "Bhagwandas, come here." Bhagwandas was surprised to hear his

own name. He looked around and saw the child-celibate Nilkanth Varni sitting under a banyan tree. Nilkanth again called Bhagwandas by his name. Still wondering, Bhagwandas went near him. He bowed to Nilkanth and sat down beside him. He thought, "This celibate surely looks divine. How did he come to know my name? How did he recognise me?"

While he was wondering thus, Nilkanth said to him, "Brother Bhagwandas, I have called you to take out the thorn which has pierced my foot. It will be a favour if you would kindly remove it. I shall then be relieved of the pain."

"Of course, I will," replied Bhagwandas and sat opposite Nilkanth. Nilkanth stretched out his right leg and placed it on the lap of Bhagwandas. As Bhagwandas lifted the foot to take out the thorn, he noticed the nine marks on the sole of Nilkanth's foot. He saw the *urdhvarekha*, *ashtakon*, *swastik*, *jambu*, *java*, *vajra*, *ankush*, *ketu* and *padma*. But no thorn was visible on the sole. Bhagwandas was much pleased to see the nine marks on the sole. he said to



Bhagwandas observes the holy marks

Nilkanth, "O Brahmachariji, the thorn is perhaps in the other sole, not in this."

So Nilkanth stretched out his left leg and placed it on his lap. Bhagwandas observed the remaining seven marks on the left sole. They consisted of *trikon*, *kalash*, *gopad*, *dhanushya*, *meen*, *ardhachandra* and *vyom*.

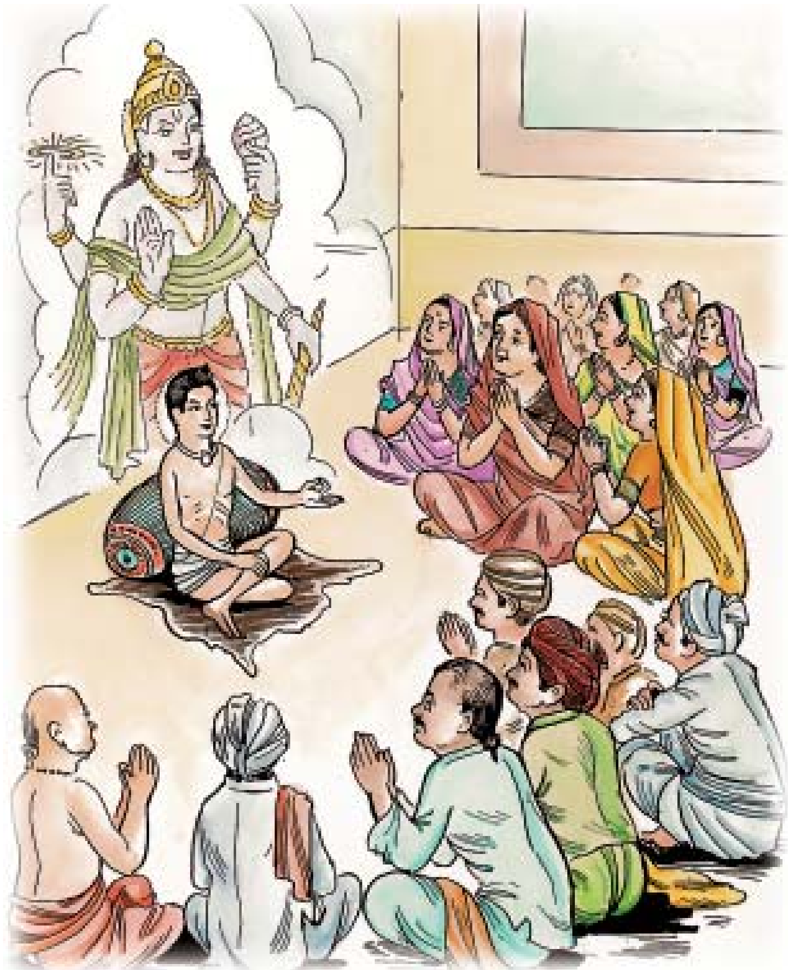
Then he suddenly remembered what his mother had told him. He looked at the sun in the west and then in the east. He saw his own shadow, but not that of Nilkanth. He felt extremely happy. Without waiting for a moment, he requested and prayed to Nilkanth to accompany him, made him sit in the boat and took him home. They reached home late at night. Bhagwandas knocked at the door. His old mother came to open the door. The wife of Bhagwandas too came to the door with a lamp in her hand to see who it was.

The door opened. Both the mother and daughter-in-law were amazed at what they saw. The light of the lamp was passing through the body of Nilkanth. The mother was exhilarated. Her joy knew no bounds. The wife of Bhagwandas prepared fresh loaves and fed Nilkanth with hot loaves, milk, butter and sugarcandy. They attended on him all through the night.

In the early morning, the mother of Bhagwandas went from home to home in the village inviting everyone to come and have *darshan* of God in her house.

People, out of curiosity and doubt, came to see him. Nilkanth imparted a few words of wisdom and appeared to all in the form of Chaturbhuj Narayan holding a conch shell, mace, wheel and lotus in his four hands. Everyone bowed at the feet of Nilkanth.

Nilkanth stayed for two days at the old woman's house and then blessed the family, "All three of you will pass away shortly and will be reborn in north Gujarat in the



Nilkanth gives darshan as Chaturbhuj Narayan

village of Vadnagar at the house of Jumakhram Bhavsar. There, after a few years I will meet you and accept your services and fulfill your wishes." Nilkanth then left early next morning.

Nilkanth crossed a gulf called Harbola by boat. After much difficulty he reached Setubandh Rameshwar. This is

among the four most important pilgrim places of the country as it contains a Swayambhu Jyotirling. The mandir is very big and ancient. The young Brahmachari would daily bathe in the sea and have *darshan* of the *murti* of Rameshwar. Wherever Nilkanth went he attracted people because of his gracious look and piety. He stayed there for two months and then left for Dhanushyakoti.

Here, after the Ramayan war was over, at Vibhishan's request, Shri Ram broke the bridge to Lanka with his bow. Therefore it is called Dhanushyakoti.

From here Nilkanth went to Darbhashayan and had *darshan* of the Dwibhuj Narayan *murti*. From there he proceeded to Sunderraj (also called Vrishabhadri), which is twelve miles from Madurai and contains the *murti* of Sundarraj (Narayan). The mandir also has the *murtis* of Sridevi and Bhudevi. After having the *darshan* of Meenakshi mandir, he proceeded to Bhutpuri (now called Sriperumbudur).

32. SHIV-PARVATI COME FOR DARSHAN OF NILKANTH

There are many hills and forests on the way to Bhutpuri. Nilkanth continued to walk for four days continuously without food to eat or water to drink on the way. On the fifth day he fainted because of exhaustion.

On regaining consciousness he saw a well nearby. He approached the well and saw that the water was deep but clean. He drew the water by attaching a long vine to his gourd and releasing it into the well. Nilkanth took a bath and performed his daily rituals. Then he placed his Shaligram in a vessel and began to bathe it with the water from the gourd. He poured water on the Shaligram, but a miracle happened! The Shaligram drank all the water. Nilkanth then poured another gourdful of water on it, but



Shiv and Parvati offer their services to Nilkanth

the Shaligram drank that too. He poured water on it for the third, and fourth time, and the Shaligram drank it all. Nilkanth thought, "Since the Shaligram is so thirsty, it must be hungry, too. But where can I get food from?"

Even though he is God himself, Nilkanth was worshipping the Shaligram with profound devotion to teach devotion to all devotees. As he was thinking about how to get food for the Shaligram, a couple, dressed like renunciants came there on a bull. This was a dense jungle where no person could tread, so who could these people be? With this thought Nilkanth asked them who they were. The woman said, "He is Shivji and I am Sati. You have been hungry for so many days, so we have brought you *sathvo*."

Shiv and Parvati were very happy to be able to serve Nilkanth. They saluted him, obtained his blessings and disappeared into the sky.

From here Nilkanth went to Bhutpuri and after staying for a few days he went to Totadri.

33. NILKANTH IN TOTADRI

Totadri is the main seat of Shrimad Ramanujacharya. Here his consecrated wooden seat is preserved. In the mandir there is a *murti* of Bhagwan Vishnu reclining under the hood of Shesh. When Nilkanth reached there, a leading sannyasi named Jeer Swami was the successor of the *gadi* of Ramanujacharya. Nilkanth Varni stayed with him for some time. He listened to the texts of the Ramanuja Sampraday. He grasped the essence of its philosophy and liked their *upasana*. The philosophy and the Sampraday of Ramanujacharya appeared to him to be simpler and better in comparison with those of the other schools. Nilkanth therefore stayed there for a few months.

Nilkanth observed that the sannyasis here followed the code of not touching money and addictions, but they had not renounced women. They associated freely with women. Nilkanth did not approve of this and asked Jeer Swami, "Realising that you have renounced, I venture to ask you a question. What should we understand from the injunction given in the scriptures that a sadhu should renounce women and wealth? Women, wealth and taste are considered the biggest elements of bondage for a sadhu. They captivate even Brahma and others. Therefore please explain the course which a sadhu should adopt."

For Jeer Swami the concept of renouncing women was unimaginable. Hence he was annoyed and shouted, "Is there anybody here? Drive this boy out. He ventures to discuss the conduct of a sadhu! Though a mere child, he attempts to embrace the universe. Take him away from here. I shall not eat and drink till then. I don't want such disciples."

Nilkanth said, "Oh preceptor, it does not befit a guru or a disciple to fret and fume like this. Just as a small fire can

reduce a palace to ashes, so can a little anger thwart salvation."

Jeer Swami got all the more angry on hearing these words. He dismissed Nilkanth from the monastery. Nilkanth passed the night at a place opposite the monastery.

From here Nilkanth went to Kanyakumari which is also called Kumarikashetra. At this place one finds the confluence of the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean. Nilkanth bathed here and travelled northwards. He went for the *darshan* of Lambe Narayan and Chote Narayan and proceeded forward.

34. NORTHWARDS FROM KANYAKUMARI

Crossing the Krutamala river on the way, Nilkanth arrived in Padmanabh (Trivendram). In a mandir here he had the *darshan* of the huge *murti* of Bhagwan Padmanabh reclining on *Shesh-shayya* along with Brahma seated in a lotus coming out of his navel.

Walking northwards from there, Nilkanth arrived at the holy place of Janardan. It is situated near the sea, and yet it abounds in freshwater springs. Here there is a big mandir of Lord Janardan. After his *darshan*, Nilkanth reached Adikeshav. Here he had *darshan* of the *murti* of the deity Adikeshav in a mandir standing on the bank of the river Tamravarni.

After walking further northwards for a few days, Nilkanth reached Srirangapattam, where he had the *darshan* of Srirang. Then he went to Yadavgiri (Melukote). A mandir of Sampatkumar is located here which Ramanujacharya had renovated. After having *darshan* of the *murti* of Narayan in that mandir, Nilkanth proceeded further to the north.

On the way he bathed in the Kalyaniganga river and then arrived in Sundur. There he did *darshan* of the mandir of Swami Kartikey on the hill known as Parvatgiri. Coming

down from the hill, Nilkanth entered the region of Kishkindha. There he took a bath in the Tungabhadra river and then visited the holy place of Sfatikshila situated on the Malyavan mountain. A mandir is built inside a cave at this place with the *murtis* of Ram, Laxman and Janki. Nilkanth did their *darshan* devoutly.

Coming down, he reached Rushyamuk mountain. This place is known as Chakratirth of the south because the river Tungabhadra here curves like a bow. The river is very deep. Nilkanth took a bath in it and offered his respects in the Shri Ram mandir on the mountain.

Nilkanth visited the city of Kishkindha, passed through Shabri forest, crossed the Tungabhadra river and arrived at Pampa Sarovar. There are mandirs dedicated to the deities of Srirangji and Laxminarayan on the hills near the Pampa Sarovar. Nilkanth had the *darshan* of those deities.

Trekking through Maharashtra, Nilkanth arrived at Pandharpur. He stayed there for two months on the bank of the Chandrabhaga river and had *darshan* of Vithoba. From Pandharpur he went to Puna in the Ashadhi Samvat year of 1855 (Vikram Samvat 1854). At that time Bapu Gokhale, the minister of the king, was in charge of the administration of the city. He was very devout and aspired for salvation. He devoutly served Nilkanth and became his disciple. Nilkanth spent the month of Ashadh there.

At the beginning of the month of Shravan Nilkanth took the path to the Vindhyachal mountains. After walking for a few days he reached the confluence of the rivers Tapi and Mauna. He took a bath here and reached Buranpur on the other side of the bank. Proceeding from there, he reached Malegam. He stayed there for five days in a Shiv mandir. He took a bath in the Mosam Ganga. Proceeding further from there he passed through the Dandakaranya and arrived at Nasik. After a bath in the Godavari river, he

did *darshan* of Tryambakeshwar Mahadev. Then Nilkanth proceeded towards Gujarat.

35. NILKANTH IN GUJARAT

After walking for five days, Nilkanth reached Suryapur (Surat). He stayed at the Godiya mandir of the Nirvana school. For three days, he went without food. On the fourth day a gardener's wife gave him some provisions, which he cooked and ate. He then went to Ashwinikumar Ghat. The Tapi river was very deep here. People dissuaded Nilkanth; but he plunged into the river and swam across to the other bank.

From there he walked on the bank of the river Narmada and after some time reached Bharuch and stayed there for the night at the Ashvamedh Ghat. Then after passing through the village of Pimpali, he reached Tavare. There he did *darshan* of the Kapileshwar mandir and took bath in the Narmada and then came to the Bawapyara Ghat at Shuklatirth.

From Shuklatirth Nilkanth went to Ambali and Ansuya. There is a mandir of goddess Ansuya here. Rajbai, a devout aspirant residing at the village of Ambali, gave Nilkanth milk to drink and prayed to him to stay there and drink milk at her place every day. Seeing her devotion, Nilkanth stayed for seven days in Ansuya. But he used to bathe in the Narmada, and go to the village of Ambali to drink milk at the house of Rajbai.

Thereafter he proceeded to Shukeshwar and Vyas-tirth. Thus sanctifying the various places where austerities had been performed by the ancient rishis on the banks of the Narmada, Nilkanth went ahead.

Walking along the bank of the Narmada, Nilkanth passed through Chanod and reached Karnali. He did *darshan* of the ancient mandirs of this place and then went

to Dabhoi. There he stayed for the night in the mandir of Vaghnath Mahadev.

From there he passed through Vasai and arrived in Vatapattam (Vatodar or Vadodara). He stayed there for the night at the Mandvi gate which was in the centre of Vadodara. The sun had already set by that time. But Nilkanth's divine personality in the faint light had attracted a number of people. They came and gathered before him. Out of curiosity they asked about him. At that time a merchant called Amichand came out of his shop. He had a lantern in his hand. He made his way through the crowd and came to Nilkanth. When he saw the face of Nilkanth with the aid of the lantern he became convinced that he was in the presence of a great person. With folded hands he asked Nilkanth whether he would have any food. Varni told him to bring whatever was ready. He rushed home and asked his wife and she said *khichdi* was ready. Amichand said, "A prominent yogi has come and I wish to feed him."

Amichand's wife had already done the *darshan* of Nilkanth. She had experienced great bliss and had prepared the food with great devotion. Amichand brought a plateful of *khichdi* and ghee for Nilkanth. He took two morsels and gave back the rest as *prasad*. Amichand took it home and when his wife ate the sanctified *khichdi* her worldly desires disappeared and she experienced inner peace.

She told her husband about her experience and urged him to invite Nilkanth the next day. Early next morning when Amichand went to invite Varni to come home for food, he was preparing to resume his journey. Nilkanth told the merchant, "I wish to take your service in future." Amichand said with folded hands, "But what guarantee is there about my existence in future?" Nilkanth replied, "To keep you alive till then is in my hands." And so saying Nilkanth smiled and added, "You have the *murtis* of

Lakshminarayan buried in your house. I will send my sadhus, when I need them from you."*

Amichand was surprised to hear this. His father had buried the *murtis* and only he knew of it. He bowed at the feet of Nilkanth. The young Brahmachari blessed him and departed.

On the way he took a bath in the Mahi river and reached the village of Navli. He ate the food offered by Laldas and blessed him, saying, "You will get a virtuous son (Kashiabhai)." From there he went to Bamangam. In this village he ate food consisting of a loaf and *dal* of *muth* at the house of a Brahmin, Khoda Pandya. Nilkanth blessed him, and went to Dakor via Anand.

After the *darshan* of Shri Ranchhodrai at Dakor, Nilkanth arrived at Vartal. Here Joban Pagi, taking Nilkanth to be a great sage, offered him some food provisions. Nilkanth cooked his food and ate it. Joban Pagi pressed him to stay in Vartal, but Nilkanth promised him that he would return on some other occasion, and thus proceeded to Bochasan. There he put up on the bank of the village pond under a banyan tree.

36. NILKANTH AT BOCHASAN

Nilkanth found the village to be very beautiful. On that day the village was full of *patidars*, who had come from neighbouring villages. Nilkanth inferred that there must be a festival in the village. At that time the women-folk came to the lake for bathing. Varni immediately got up and went to the Ramji mandir. The priest, Narsinhdas, received him warmly.

On that day the village chief, Kandas Patel, had

* As predicted by Nilkanth many years later when the mandir in Vartal was ready, he sent sadhus to fetch the murtis from Amichand Sheth and installed them in the central shrine.

arranged a feast for Brahmins. The villagers had the *darshan* of Nilkanth and were greatly impressed by his divinity. The village *patidar*, Veribhai, had told Kandas in advance about the arrival of Varni. Kandas thus sent his son Kashidas to invite Nilkanth to his house.

Nilkanth was in meditation and Kashidas was stunned by the Varni's illustrious form. He felt the brightness of several suns emanating from Nilkanth's body. Nilkanth opened his eyes after a short time. Kashidas approached him slowly and falling at his feet requested, "O Brahmchariji! Please come to our house for food." Nilkanth agreed to visit the chief's house as he was convinced of Kandas's devotion.

He came to the house and sat outside the main porch. The old mother of Kandas, Nanibai, was overjoyed on having the *darshan* of the young Brahamachari. Nilkanth then asked her, "Mother, bring the *ladu*." Naniba went into the kitchen to bring some *ladus*. But the Brahmins refused, saying, "The food has not been offered to God." Nanibai returned empty-handed, so Nilkanth said, "Mother, bring some milk and rice." But there was not a drop of milk in the house. "Where can we get milk at this hour," thought Kandas. Nanibai, the wife of Kandas, had great faith in Nilkanth's words. She took a vessel and went to the buffalo. To her surprise she saw milk dripping from the udders. She filled the vessel and offered Nilkanth some milk, rice and sugar. Varni was satisfied with the meal, rinsed his mouth and got up to leave.

Then Nanibai said, "Maharaj, now please stay in our house." Nilkanth replied, "Mother, I shall come again. I shall come several times and will stay in your house. I will go now as I have several things to do. Your son and your family are very fortunate. They will all become devotees. You will all worship me." With these blessings, he returned to the Ramji mandir.

After the evening *arti*, Nilkanth prophesied to the priest, "These *murtis* (of Shri Ram, Lakshman and Sita) will be housed in a magnificent mandir that will be built here."

The village folks were greatly attracted towards Nilkanth's divine personality. They told him to make Bochasan his home.

Then the priest said, "What will this boy do here? There is no need for him here." Nilkanth smiled and said, "I am not one inclined to stay in such a small place. For me there will be a huge abode here."

Early next morning, Nilkanth left Bochasan and travelled ahead.

37. LEATHER-TOUCHED WATER IS IMPURE

After leaving Bochasan, Nilkanth redeemed many people in villages and pilgrim places and reached Budhej. From there he proceeded further and came to the bank of a pond on the outskirts of Gorad village. He sat under a banyan tree. A Koli named Bijal was operating a *kosh* pulled by two bullocks. The necks of the bullocks were lacerated through labour and Nilkanth felt pity for them. The water was poured into an open tank. He entered the farm and asked the farmer, "Brother, will you give me some water to drink? I am very thirsty."

Bijal replied, "My *kosh* is operating. Drink as much water as you like."

But Nilkanth stood still and did not drink the water.

He politely told the farmer, "Brother, this is *charmavari*. This water is drawn by leather buckets. I cannot drink it."

The farmer thought Nilkanth belonged to some class of fastidious sadhus. He replied, "Bawaji, the water is very deep and if you want to drink it then you can do so! The drought has diminished the water in rivers, ponds and wells." He then added, "Maharaj, I do not have a rope and

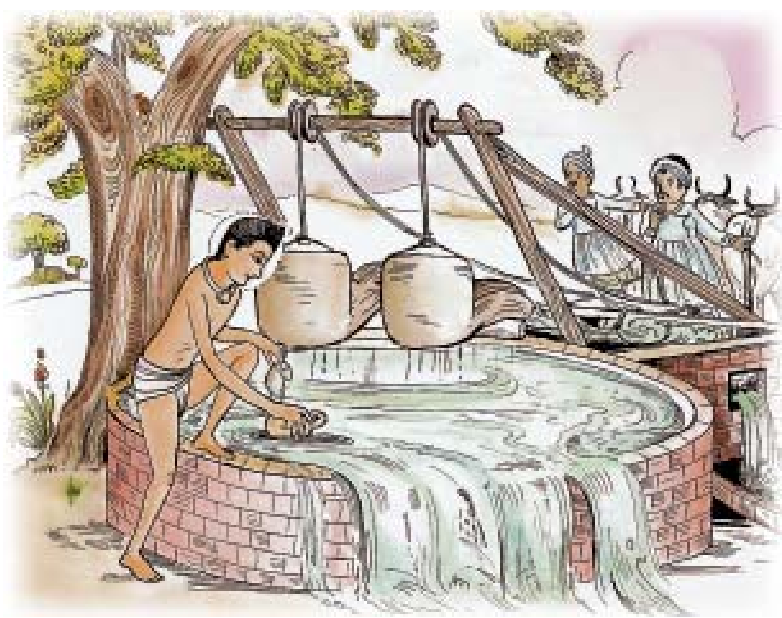
pot, otherwise I would draw water for you."

On hearing this Nilkanth smiled and said, "I do not need any rope." With these words he went near the well and held the gourd in his hands. Immediately the water in the well began to rise and touched the brim. Nilkanth filled the gourd with water, and drank to his heart's content.

Bijal was amazed to see this phenomenon. He fell at the feet of Nilkanth and requested him to keep the water at that level. He thought that if Nilkanth would stay in our village then our future would be brighter and better.

But Nilkanth was in a hurry to leave. Bijal rushed to his village and declared, "A mahatma has come to my farm and the water in the well came up for him to drink. Let us all stop him from going away."

The villagers were surprised to hear this and they rushed to the farm. But by then Nilkanth had left and was



Nilkanth raises the water to the top of the well

far away. They were greatly disappointed. Then they saw a shepherd come from the same direction and asked him about Nilkanth. He replied, "Yes, I saw an ascetic travelling two hand-lengths above the ground at great speed. You will not be able to reach him." They were all convinced that he was God himself.

38. WHO GAVE THE RIGHT TO KILL?

Nilkanth arrived at Dhanka, a pilgrim place on the shores of the Gulf of Khambhat. Varni cast a benign glance at the pilgrims. He then went to Ramsar lake in the north and drew water from a nearby well, offered it to Thakorji and drank it. He set off for the Shikotar river. On the way he met a man. His ugly clothes and bag made Nilkanth ask him, "Brother, who are you? And what do you have in your bag?"

The man said, "I am a Koli by caste and Lakho is my name. My bag contains fish that I have caught."

Nilkanth was greatly pained on hearing this. He said, "Brother, among Kolis there have been many devotees." Having said this he pointed his finger at the bag and added, "Why have you killed so many fish? And when will you be liberated from such sins?" Every word of Varni sent a chill down Lakho's spine. Nilkanth asked further, "Brother! Won't God ask you why you have killed so many of his creatures? What right have you to kill living beings?"

Lakho's conscience was pricked. Tears rolled down his cheeks. With folded hands he said, "In this dreadful drought, because I could not get any grains, I had to take to this occupation. It is no doubt, a sin, to kill living creatures but I had to do it out of necessity."

Varni replied, "Lakho, don't Banias and Brahmins get grains? They are not dying out of hunger? Similarly, if you decide to eat only grains, God will certainly provide for

your needs and you will have no famine in your house."

Then Nilkanth touched Lakho's bag and all the dead fish were revived and released into the river. Lakho's heart became unburdened and light. He was convinced that Nilkanth is God. He fell at his feet and requested, "O Brahmachariji! Pease stay in Vadgam tonight. It is evening and the road ahead is deserted. And besides, where the rivers Mahi and Sabarmati meet the water is deep and impossible to cross. And to add more there is the threat of tigers and leopards lurking in the bushes on the opposite bank." Varni listened quietly and then said, "Lakho! I feel like going to places where the way is more difficult and dangerous, the river waters are deeper and the fear of tigers and leopards are greater. Wherever I set foot, fear vanishes from there." Saying this he took Lakho to the shore of Shikotar.

The sun had already set. There was an eerie silence all around. But the noise produced by the confluence of the two rivers made the place appear more dangerous than it actually was. Lakho pleaded once again, "Maharaj, it is very difficult to cross this point. Even ace swimmers can't make it because of the terrible waves. Therefore, let the tide ebb by tomorrow and then you can cross it. Tomorrow I shall take you to Dholera."

But these appeals fell on deaf ears. Nilkanth said, "When I cross I will wave my deer skin to show that I have crossed over safely." Lakho's reverence and affection for Nilkanth, who had brought about a change in his heart and revived the dead fish, had increased.

After blessing Lakho, Nilkanth set foot on the water and started walking briskly. Lakho was astonished to see Nilkanth walking on the water. In the darkness he saw a trail of light reach the opposite shore. When Nilkanth waved his deer skin, Lakho realised that the divine

Brahmachari had left him. He felt sad at heart and rushed to the village to proclaim the glory of Varni. It appeared to one and all that a great soul endowed with divine qualities had graced their village with his presence.

Nilkanth arrived at Vagad to spend the night. A potter, Rana Bavaloj, offered him a mattress, but the young celibate preferred to sleep on a heap of soil as was his discipline.

39. REVEALING HIS DIVINITY

Nilkanth continued his redemptory travels by crossing villages, towns and pilgrim places and came to the western side of Gujarat, which is bounded by the Arabian sea. Wherever Varni set foot, he captivated people with his divine personality. Whether people asked him in astonishment or not, as to who he was, Nilkanth would reveal his divinity and sometimes foretell their future.

Trekking along the coast, Nilkanth reached Kukad village in Bhavnagar district. At that time the ruler Bhagwansinhji and his administrator, Khoja Jiva Thakkar, were sitting by the gate of his home. Varni stood there for some time. After looking at him, the ruler took him to be a Brahmachari who was seeking alms. He said in jest, "Maharaj! Where do you live? What's your name? What is your caste?"

Nilkanth replied with pride, "My country is an intangible place, caste is Brahm, and my names are endless. I cannot even count my names."

Saying this, he left the place. The *darbar's* employee was a clever man. He thought the celibate was no ordinary yogi, otherwise he would not have replied like that. He told the ruler, "Sir, whether you believe it or not, the Brahmachari is a great yogi. It was wrong to have not honoured him."

The ruler was a seeker of salvation. He said, "Jiva, what

you say appears to be true. We have made a big mistake. But it may not be too late because he couldn't have gone very far. Let us go and call him back."

And so saying they went in search of Varni. Nilkanth had spread his deerskin and was meditating under a mango tree by the bank of the river. He was sitting in *padmasan*. His eyes were calm and absorbed in meditation. His water gourd was lying nearby. When Bhagwansinh touched him, Nilkanth immediately opened his eyes. He found both the ruler and his administrator sitting before him with folded hands.

Bhagwansinh said, "Yogi! Allowing you to have gone hungry when you had come to my doorstep was not good on my part. And being dull-witted we could not grasp your divine utterings. So now come to my home and accept my hospitality."

Varni said, "Darbar! Bring your alms here. I shall cook and eat." The ruler at once called for provisions. After offering to Thakorji, Nilkanth ate a little of what he had cooked and gave the rest as *prasad* to Bhagwansinh and Jiva. Both of them felt happy and experienced inner peace. Nilkanth left after promising to return again.

Nilkanth reached Dihor. There he met several old men chit-chatting in the village square. He gave them a discourse. Then a Bhavsar lady and her son Mulji devoutly gave alms to Varni and took back the remainder as *prasad*.

Nilkanth then arrived at Lakadiya. Premji Thakkar was a devout man. He had a mat made of grass reeds that he desired to offer to a *jogi* or great sadhu. Nilkanth came to his shop and said, "You will not find a *jogi* like me in countless universes." Nilkanth sanctified the mat, and then took the road to Nana Gopnath.

Varni offered worship to Bholanath and arrived in Piparla. Here a Brahmin lady devotedly gave Nilkanth a

freshly made puffed-up *rotlo* with ghee. The Brahmachari appreciated her devotion by accepting it and peeled the top layer. To her surprise the lady saw a universe in the *rotlo*, and realised the glory of Nilkanth's divine form.

On arriving in Gopnath, Nilkanth, with his eyes cast down, was going with great speed. A woman was coming from the opposite direction. She stood still after watching the lightning speed at which Varni was going. She was convinced of his extraordinary spiritual powers and uttered spontaneously, "O Maharaj! Please stop."

Varni stopped in his footsteps and looked behind. The lady came running to him. She was astonished when she came near.

"What have you in the little pot?" Nilkanth enquired.

"Maharaj, it is filled with milk. Please have it", she said.

Varni filtered the milk into his gourd and drank it. Then he asked her, "Sister who are you?"

She replied, "I stay at Pithalpur. We are Khojas by caste and my name is Janbai. It is my practice to offer milk to Mahadevji every day but, if I meet anyone on the way then I offer it as a rule to that person."

Nilkanth then responded, "Janbai! Today, Mahadev himself has accepted the milk you have offered." Nilkanth then blessed her with his divine vision and she experienced a feeling of peace within.

On arriving in Mahuva, Nilkanth had a bath in the river Malan and then came across Pitambar Sheth. The latter offered fruits to Nilkanth. The Brahmachari blessed him and he became a devotee. Nilkanth stayed under a tamarind tree by the Hanumanji shrine in Mahuva. He was given alms by the *bawas* on the first day, the merchants on the second and *bawa* Fulvani's place on the third. Each day Nilkanth would bathe in the river and then meditate by the banks.

Varni then arrived in Guptaprayag via Tulsishyam. Here he sat under a rayan tree. Each day, after bathing, he would deliver discourses to pilgrims. Bhana Pathak of Vadnagar, used to offer him food with reverence.

One day he asked Nilkanth, “Yatiraj what’s your name?”

“My name is Sahajanand. People will know me by this name in future.”

Bhana Pathak was pleased at Nilkanth’s words. Brahmachari Nrusinhanand of the Sheshshayi mandir also offered alms to Nilkanth. His request for the water reservoirs to remain full all the year round was granted by Nilkanth. Varni stayed at this beautiful pilgrim place for 1½ months.

Nilkanth arrived at the village of Dolaha and stayed at a shepherd’s settlement. When the shepherd offered alms, Nilkanth refused it. But he asked for cow’s milk and drank it. At night the shepherd’s guru arrived. The settlement was filled with the sound of *bhajans*. It was late night when everyone retired to bed. Varni was sleeping near the guru. Every time the guru changed sides he uttered, “O Ram!” And Nilkanth naturally responded with, “Yes.” When this happened three to four times the guru got up and asked,

“Are you Ram?”

Nilkanth replied, “Yes. Only he who is Ram will reply to the name.”

And then Nilkanth appeared in the form of Bhagwan Ram to the guru. The guru was convinced of Varni’s divinity. Early next morning, Nilkanth left for Lodhva.

40. NILKANTH AT THE HOUSE OF LAKHU CHARAN

In Lodhva there lived a *charan* devotee named Lakhubai. This woman used to go into *samadhi* and see

things that are out of sight with a clear vision. Sitting in Lodhva, she could see and hear things hundreds of miles away. Lakhu could walk through walls without any problem. She used to sit in meditation for hours and go into *samadhi*. Lakhu was a disciple of Atmanand Swami. Two *brahmacharis* named Vithalanand and Balanand resided with her. Lakhu had a herd of buffaloes and therefore there was plenty of milk and curd at her house.

Nilkanth arrived at the house of Lakhubai in Lodhva. She used to give alms to every sadhu who came to the village. She used to test the genuineness of the greatest of sadhus and sannyasis. When she saw Nilkanth, Lakhu felt he was great like Sanak and other sages. She, therefore, insisted he stay at her house for three months. Every day she served him fresh milk, butter and sugar.

One day Nilkanth asked Lakhubai, "Can you tell me, who initiated you into this path of devotion?"

On hearing this question, Lakhubai started narrating her story, "Atmanand Swami was my guru. His seat was at Tramba village near Girnar. Atmanand Swami was *vachansiddh* and a true *sadguru*. He was a *jivanmukta*. He was a believer and supporter of the Advait philosophy; hence he preached that God is *nirakar*. So we hold God to be formless. Atmanand Swami had performed many miracles in our village. He had initiated Vithalanand and Balanand also. They have been living at my house according to his command. We identify him with God."

Lakhubai stopped for a while, and digressed to another topic.

41. THE STORY OF RAMANAND SWAMI

"In Ayodhya there lived a Saravariya Brahmin named Ajayprasad. His wife's name was Sarmani. On Janmashtmi (Shravan *sud* 8) of Samvat 1795 she gave birth to a son,

named Ramsharma. From his very childhood, Ramsharma was devoted to God. He was very intelligent. He studied at home till he was twelve years old. Then he left home for further studies. After that, he never returned home. He travelled from one holy place to another and continued his search for a true guru. In the course of his tour he came to Talaja in Kathiawad.

"One Kashiram Shastri lived in Talaja. He was very learned. He had many religious books in Sanskrit. Ramsharma stayed at his house and studied many of those books. After finishing his studies, he set out on a pilgrimage to Dwarka. There a sannyasi told him, 'One Atmanand Swami lives in Tramba village at the foot of Girnar mountain. He is a sadhu with great attainments and performs miracles.' So Ramsharma went to Tramba village in search of him.

"Ramsharma went to Atmanand Swami and became his disciple. Atmanand Swami initiated him to his fold and named him Ramanand Swami. Then the guru and the disciple used to debate everyday. Guru Atmanand Swami would say, 'God is *nirgun* and *nirakar*. There can be no *murti* worship of God.' And disciple Ramanand would argue, 'God is *sakar*. We must worship the *murti* of God and render service to him.' Such discussions were usual.

"Ramanand Swami was a great devotee and he loved to offer devotion to Shri Krishna. He ardently desired to have the *darshan* of Shri Krishna in person. So one day he left Atmanand Swami. During his tour Ramanand Swami went to south India. He reached Srirang Kshetra, the seat of Shri Ramanujacharya. Here he commenced the worship of Shri Krishna and devotion to Ramanujacharya. Shri Krishna, pleased with his devotion, gave him *darshan* in his dream, and Ramanujacharya also gave him the Vaishnavi *diksha* in a dream. The marks of initiation were imprinted on his hands

and chest. He was ordained to spread the Vaishnav religion and to propagate the worship of God with a form.

"Before disappearing from the dream, Shri Krishna told him, 'I myself shall take birth on the earth. I shall give deliverance to an infinite number of *jivas*, and shall meet you.' Ramanand Swami felt immensely happy to hear this.



Shri Krishna gives darshan to Ramanand Swami

"Thereafter Ramanand Swami began to tour all over India, preaching the worship of Shri Krishna. Having toured the country he came back to Kathiawad and met his guru, Atmanand Swami. This time also, he had a dialogue with his guru, who was finally convinced. Thus Atmanand Swami renounced the Advait philosophy and accepted *murti*-worship and devotion to God. He also acknowledged that God is *sakar*. He asked all his disciples to submit to Ramanand and directed them, 'Hereafter all of you should follow out the instructions of Ramanand Swami.'

"After some time Atmanand Swami passed away. Ramanand Swami became very sad. He established his ashram in the village of Loj and began to preach the gospel of Shri Krishna from village to village. Wherever he went he declared, 'I am merely the drum-beater announcing the arrival of God. The hero of the play, God himself, is yet to come."

At this point in her narration, Lakhubai's throat was choked with emotion. Then she added, "Oh Brahmachari, we do not have faith in anyone other than our guru Atmanand Swami. Other disciples have submitted to Ramanand Swami, but we three have stuck to this place. I, Vithalanand and Balanand still hold that God is *nirgun* and *nirakar*. We never listen to the preachings of Ramanand Swami."

Having heard this, Nilkanth Brahmachari gave a lengthy discourse to Lakhubai, Vithalanand and Balanand. In the end he succeeded in converting them from Advait philosophy to Vishishtadvait. He impressed upon them that God is always *sakar* and that the worship of and devotion to God are of great significance. All the three were thus enlightened with true knowledge. In this way three months elapsed. Nilkanth thought, "Lakhubai has served me devoutly and she has understood the truth. Therefore let me give her something."

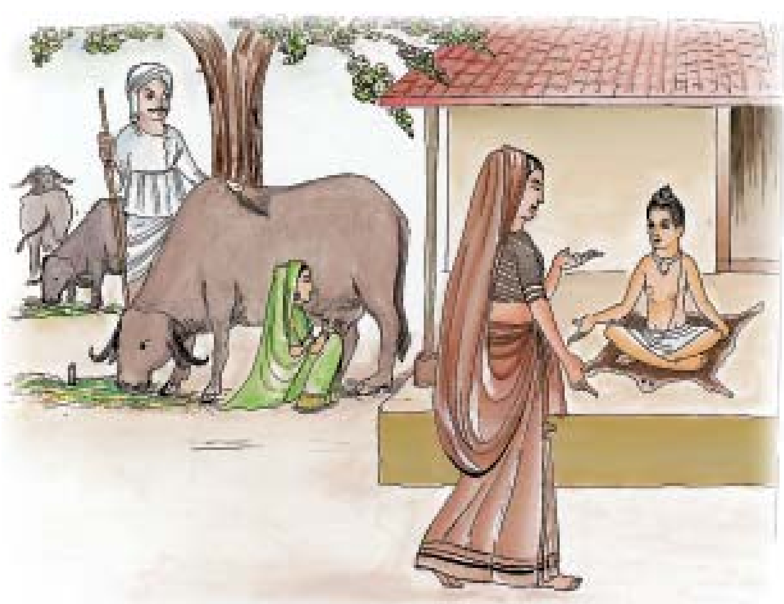
So Nilkanth told her to ask for a boon. Lakhubai

replied, “Brahmachari Maharaj, you are God incarnate, please bless me so that my son Viro, my sixty buffaloes and my fields become immortal.” Thrice Nilkanth asked her to solicit some other boon, and thrice the old woman demanded the same boon.

Then Nilkanth thought, “This old lady does not know what boon to ask for. Let me therefore give her the best thing in the world.” So thinking he told her, “Lakhubai, I bestow on you a gift of my Akshardham.” After thus blessing her, Nilkanth took the way to Prabhaspatan.

42. DARSHAN TO NARSINH MEHTA

After travelling through Prabhaspatan and Bhalka, Nilkanth proceeded towards Junagadh. There he circumambulated Mount Girnar and climbed it. He took a bath in the Damodar Kund, and in the form of Damodar



“You are God incarnate, please bless me...”

gave *darshan* to the priest of the Damodar Mandir. He then went to bathe in the Gaumukhi Ganga, where many *bawas* lived. They said to Nilkanth, “This is our place. We will not allow you to bathe here.” On hearing this, Nilkanth gave them *darshan* in the form of Bhagwan Vamanji. The *bawas* realised their mistake and themselves bathed Nilkanth, anointed *chandan* on his body, placed a garland of flowers round his neck and offered him food. At the top of Girnar in the mandir of Dattatray, Nilkanth gave *darshan* in the form of Dattatray to an ascetic.

After descending from the mountain, Nilkanth arrived at Junagadh. He went to the *mandir* of Hatkeshwar Mahadev and sat there. A Nagar Brahmin, who was passing by, saw Nilkanth and thought, “This ascetic appears to be very learned; let me ask him a few questions.” With this thought he asked Nilkanth ten questions all at one time. Nilkanth answered his questions in just two sentences. This greatly amazed the Brahmin. He fell at the feet of Nilkanth. He escorted Nilkanth to his house and offered him a dish of *shira-puri*. Nilkanth stayed at his house for the night and gave him *darshan* in the form of Shivji.

He then left Junagadh the next morning, went for the *darshan* of Bhutnath Mahadev on the way, drank water from the Khengar Vav and travelled to Vanthali. There he took a bath in Suryakund and proceeded to Piplana. In Piplana, there lived a pious Brahmin named Narsinh Mehta. Nilkanth went to his house and sat on the verandah. At that time Narsinh Mehta was reciting the *Gita* and worshipping the Shaligram. His son, Kalyanji, was sitting in the courtyard. Nilkanth asked for alms from Kalyanji, who replied, “The food is not yet ready. If you kindly wait for a while, I can make and serve you a good meal.” Nilkanth told him, “I cannot wait till the food is cooked. I am on a pilgrimage. You may bring whatever is ready.” And he

added, "If the food is not ready then I shall leave." And Nilkanth started walking away. As he left he shot a glance at the Shaligram being worshipped by Narsinh Mehta. At this, a miracle happened. A bright light issued from the Shaligram.

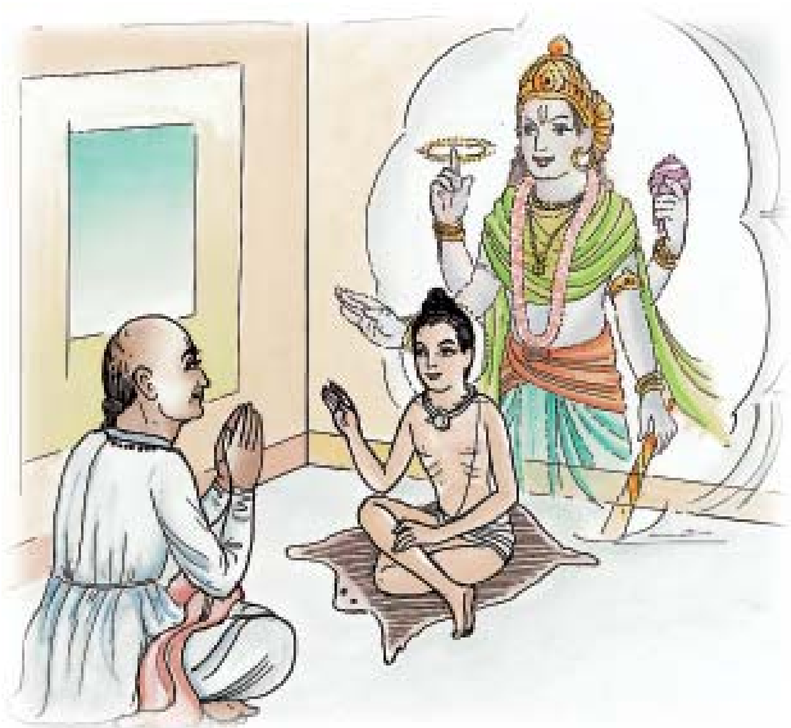
And Narsinh Mehta soon came out of the house. Not seeing Nilkanth, he asked Kalyanji, "Where is that ascetic with whom you were talking?" Kalyanji replied, "He was asking for food right now. I requested him to wait so that I could get something for him. But he did not wait and went away." On hearing this, Narsinh Mehta sent Kalyanji running to the outskirts of the village in search of Nilkanth. He met him on the outskirts, prostrated at his feet, prayed to him and brought him back to his home.

Nilkanth said, "Don't delay. Bring whatever that can be prepared at once."

Narsinh Mehta milked the buffalo and offered him fresh milk and *juvar*. After the meal, Nilkanth gave Narsinh Mehta *darshan* in the form of Chaturbhuj Narayan. Narsinh Mehta offered his *pranams* and recalled the words of his guru Ramanand Swami, "I am an incarnation of Uddhavji. Purushottam Prabhu will come later and accept your service." At that time he also heard a voice from the sky in Girnar saying, "God himself will come to your house and give *darshan* in the form of Chaturbhuj Narayan."

Narsinh Mehta fell at the feet of Nilkanth and narrated the whole story to him. Nilkanth asked him, "How did you hear the voice from the sky?"

Narsinh Mehta began to narrate his story, "From childhood I had yearned to meet God. Everyday I worshipped God and performed charitable and religious acts, but could not find God. Then I left home and wandered in Girnar. I met a number of *jogis*, *jatis* and *bawas*, but I could not get mental peace. The fire of worldly



Nilkanth gives darshan to Narsinh Mehta

desires within could not be extinguished. Hence out of despair, I climbed a tree with the intention of committing suicide. Then thrice I heard a voice from the sky saying, "Do not worry. Do not put an end to your life. God himself will grace your house with his presence and give you *darshan* in the form of Chaturbhuj Narayan." So I returned home, and have since then been carrying on worship and offering prayers in the hope of getting your *darshan*. Today I have had your *darshan*, and am therefore emancipated."

Nilkanth then stood up and said, "Now I must go." On hearing this Narsinh Mehta escorted him to the banyan tree on the outskirts of the village and then saw a miracle. Ten incarnations emerged, one from each of the ten directions,

and merged in Nilkanth. All around there was bright light. Then Nilkanth suddenly disappeared. Narsinh Mehta returned home, profoundly pleased.

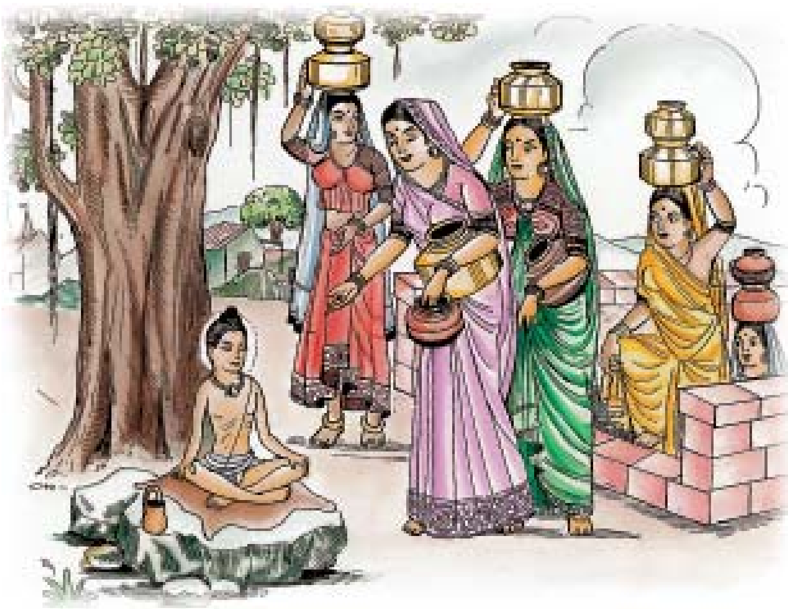
Proceeding from there, Nilkanth passed through the village of Akha and arrived at the house of Jetha Mer in Madhada. Pleased with Jetha Mer's observance of celibacy, he favoured him with his divine *darshan* and then went to Mangrol. He put up at the Dosavav in the west of Mangrol. Here Gordhanbhai, a Bania, gave Nilkanth *sukhadi* to eat. From Mangrol Nilkanth proceeded to Loj.

43. NILKANTH IN LOJ

Nilkanth arrived at Loj on the early morning of 21 August 1799 CE (Shravan *vad* 6, Samvat 1856). He was at once attracted to the place. The whole area was bathed in greenery because of plentiful rain. It was daybreak. Nilkanth bathed in a stepwell situated in the north of the village. He then sat for meditation on a big stone under a banyan tree.

As the dim light of the dawning sun grew in the eastern horizon, women carrying pitchers on their heads came to the well to draw water. Their eyes were arrested by Nilkanth's divine form. They all stood rooted to the spot. Despite his emaciated body his face was illustrious. Who could this Brahmachari be? They repeatedly looked at Nilkanth and were moved by his renunciation. Gradually all the women came and stood near the child-celibate. They were all waiting for him to open his eyes. But he was absorbed in meditation. They were all debating among themselves as to what made him renounce the world at this young age.

Meanwhile, a sadhu belonging to the local ashram came there to draw water. He too was greatly attracted by the young Brahmachari. He also waited for him to open his eyes. After waiting for a long time, he went to draw water



The village women were curious about the young Brahmachari

from the nearby stepwell.

After filling the pitcher he once again came and stood before Nilkanth. He experienced the bliss of the young Brahmachari's *darshan*. In a short time Nilkanth opened his eyes.

The sadhu who was greatly impressed by his lustrous eyes asked, "Brahmachari, where have you come from? What is your name? What are the names of your parents? What made you renounce the world? Who is your Guru?"

Nilkanth smiled and replied, "Sadhuram, one who has renounced does not have caste, country or relatives. Whoever frees him from worldly ties are his true parents and guru. I have come in search of such a guru." The sadhu enquired again with folded hands. Nilkanth asked, "Sadhuram, what is your name? Whose disciple are you? To what Sampraday do you belong?"

The sadhu replied, "My name is Sukhanand. Our guru is Swami Ramanand. He is an acharya of the Ramanuja Sampraday. His ashram is here and 50 sadhus live in that ashram."

Nilkanth made eager inquiries about Ramanand Swami. Sukhanand said, "Ramanand Swami is currently touring Kutch. Come and stay in our ashram. Ramanand Swami's principal disciple Muktanand Swami is there. The sadhus will be pleased to have your *darshan*. Muktanand Swami will also be immensely pleased to see you."

Varni was touched by Sukhanand Swami's humility and politeness and said, "Sadhuram, I do not go where there are lots of people." Sukhanand Swami replied, "If you don't come to the ashram then Muktanand Swami will himself come to fetch you."

At these words Nilkanth agreed to come to the ashram. As soon as he entered the ashram, he met Muktanand Swami and Nilkanth saluted him. Sukhanand Swami introduced Nilkanth. Muktanand Swami was greatly impressed by the *darshan* of Nilkanth. When Sukhanand Swami went to fetch a seat for him, Nilkanth said, "The whole earth is my seat. Why honour my body with a seat?"

Then all the sadhus in the ashram began to gather. They, too, were greatly attracted by the divinity of Nilkanth. Varni saluted them reverentially. He said, "My mind is greatly soothed by your ashram and I experience bliss by seeing the sadhus." He continued, "Wherever I have travelled I've always asked five philosophical questions. But so far I have not come across anybody who can give satisfactory answers."

Muktanand Swami replied with folded hands, "I shall answer your questions the way I have been taught by my guru Ramanand Swami."

Varni asked, "Swami what is jiva? What is ishvar? And

what is maya? Explain to me the characteristics of Brahm and Parabrahm." Muktanand Swami pondered upon the questions and then said, "Varniraj! You have asked very subtle questions at this young age. The nature of the questions proclaim your greatness."

Saying this Muktanand Swami answered the questions with all humility. Nilkanth said, "I have put these questions to several people but all of them had difficulty in answering them. You have the knowledge to answer them. This shows the grace guru Ramanand Swami has for you."

Nilkanth was eager to go wherever Ramanand Swami was to have his *darshan*. But Muktanand assured him that the guru will return within a month or two and so Nilkanth decided to stay and wait at the ashram.

In his wanderings, spanning seven years, one month and eleven days, Nilkanth did not settle down at any place but now decided to stay in Loj. It was a golden day not only for the Swaminarayan Sampraday, but also for the history of India. The conclusion of his seven year sojourn was a landmark event. And his resolve to stay in Gujarat was priceless because it was the point that would change the history of Gujarat for the better.

44. SIGNIFICANCE OF NILKANTH'S TRAVELS

From Ashadh *sud* 10, Samvat 1849 to Shravan *vad* 6, Samvat 1856, Nilkanth continuously travelled for seven years, one month and eleven days* and finally settled down in Loj village. This great pilgrimage by Nilkanth was highly significant.

During the journey Nilkanth endured all sorts of hardships. He suffered cold, heat, rain and hailstorms.

* Period calculated on basis of the Vikram Samvat calender.

Many a time he went without food and water. He observed fasts. He undertook such severe austerities that the blood in his body dried up. He lived in the midst of poisonous reptiles, insects and wild beasts. He passed through forests and thickets, over mountains and through deep valleys, across lakes and gushing rivers, through winding roads and thorny tracks. Bare-bodied and bare-footed Nilkanth toured all the way without any conveyance. What was the object of this ordeal?

He endured all this to redeem innumerable *jivas*. By mere association with himself, he redeemed innumerable animals and insects, birds and beasts. He gave *darshan* to many aspirants, to thousands of devotees yearning for his *darshan* for countless births and fulfilled their quest and blessed them with deliverance. He exposed the hypocrisy of the pseudo-sadhus, *vairagis* and *bawas* and taught them a lesson. By the sheer force of his divine glance and firm resolve he destroyed evil people, thus opening the way to worship, free from danger, for the devotees of God. He redeemed thousands of sages and sadhus, who had been performing penance for many years in forests and mountains. He gave refuge to thousands of souls.

Nilkanth sanctified the whole land of Bharat through his spiritual odyssey. He sanctified the lakes, wells, rivers and oceans. He revived the pilgrim places. He purified mandirs through his divine presence. He preached to the sages and sadhus living in hermitages and monasteries by his pure and flawless conduct. He directed those who wanted to become sadhus and desired redemption on the road to Kathiawad with the intention of making them *paramhansas*.

Wherever he went, Nilkanth preached the gospel of *ahimsa* and *brahmacharya*, and for sadhus established the importance of renouncing women and wealth. He

explained the duties of householders, sages and kings. He made a deep study of the pilgrim places, *mandirs*, lives of sages and sadhus, and the philosophy, and customs and traditions of many *sampradays*. He made a mental note of the essential attributes of them all as practised in different parts of the country.

Wherever he went, Nilkanth probed whether there were any sadhus and *sampradays* favouring abjuration of women and wealth. He tried to see whether they believed that God is always *sakar*, whether they had a firm conviction in the *upasana* of God together with his ideal Bhakta, and whether there was real knowledge of the distinction between the five entities - *jiva, ishwar, maya,* Brahman and Parabrahman. Nilkanth Varni had asked questions regarding these five distinct entities in every pilgrim place, ashram, and religion, but nowhere did he receive satisfactory replies. Nilkanth did not find anywhere a single religious sect of his satisfaction as aforesaid.

It was because of these reasons that Nilkanth Varni finally chose to reside in the ashram of Ramanand Swami at Loj. Here there were sadhus who had renounced women and wealth. There was the worship of *sakar* God together with his ideal devotee. They accepted the philosophy recognising the five entities of jiva, ishvar, maya, Brahm and Parabrahm as distinct from one another. It was a pure *bhakti sampraday*. Hence Nilkanth decided to settle down in Kathiawad. He was all-knowing and had great foresight. He knew that Ramanand Swami had prepared the ground for him in the region where he wanted to work. He knew that in this land of Kathiawad, which was sanctified by the footsteps of Bhagwan Krishna, many devotees were awaiting him.

The most important reason for Nilkanth's decision to settle in Kathiawad, however, was that it was the birthplace of his divine abode, Aksharbrahm Mulji Sharma. Nilkanth

himself is Parabrahm-Purushottam. He would naturally go where his ideal devotee, the eternal abode Aksharbrahm resides. Thus Nilkanth agreed to settle down in the lovely land of Kathiawad in Gujarat.

45. DARSHAN IN TWO FORMS

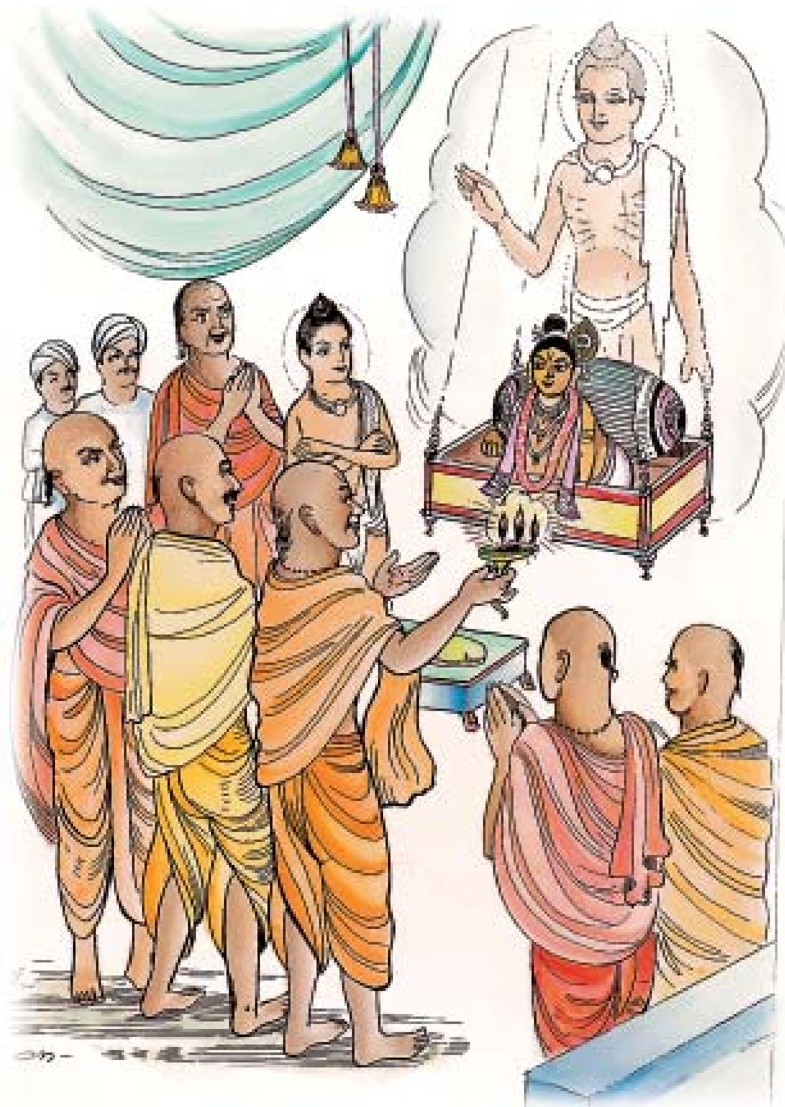
Nilkanth Varni had now been in the ashram of Ramanand Swami for three days. Today was the Janmashtmi festival. The whole ashram had been decorated with flags and buntings. Festoons of *asopalav* leaves lent beauty to the ashram. Trunks of plantain trees were planted at the entrance to the ashram. Drums were being played from early morning. Janmashtmi is a day of fast. Therefore all the sadhus and devotees had observed an absolute fast.

When evening arrived devotees began to flock to the ashram. Everyone came with a gift, small or big. Devotional songs and *dhun* resounded in the ashram. Muktanand Swami delivered a religious discourse and when the clock struck twelve midnight, a *murti* of Balkrishna was placed in a beautifully decorated cradle. Muktanand Swami performed the *arti* to celebrate the birth. To the surprise of all, Nilkanth Varni gave *darshan* in the cradle in place of the *murti* of the child Krishna. At the same time he was also seen in another form seated in the assembly beside Muktanand Swami. Everybody was convinced that Nilkanth himself was the incarnation of Shri Krishna. Thus everyone in the assembly had his *darshan* for about half-an-hour. All of them took the *prasad* of *panchajiri*, bowed to Nilkanth and returned home.

46. SEPARATE ASSEMBLIES FOR MEN AND WOMEN

There was a big compound belonging to Jivraj Sheth adjoining the ashram of Ramanand Swami. Every evening Muktanand Swami delivered his discourse there. Nilkanth

also went to listen to the discourse. Men and women from all over the village gathered there to listen to these discourses.



Nilkanth gave darshan in place of the murti of the child Krishna

Nilkanth observed that all men and women sat together to listen to the discourse. This conduct violated the vow of *brahmacharya*. Nilkanth did not approve of it and thus got up from the meeting. Muktanand Swami thought because Nilkanth was young and staunch in his asceticism he may not have liked the mixed assembly of men and women. He thus decided to explain about it to Nilkanth later and carried on with his discourse. But with the departure of Nilkanth the minds of everyone went with him. They felt a void and lost their concentration. Muktanand Swami was amazed by this. Never before had such a vacuum been created and yet why did it happen today?

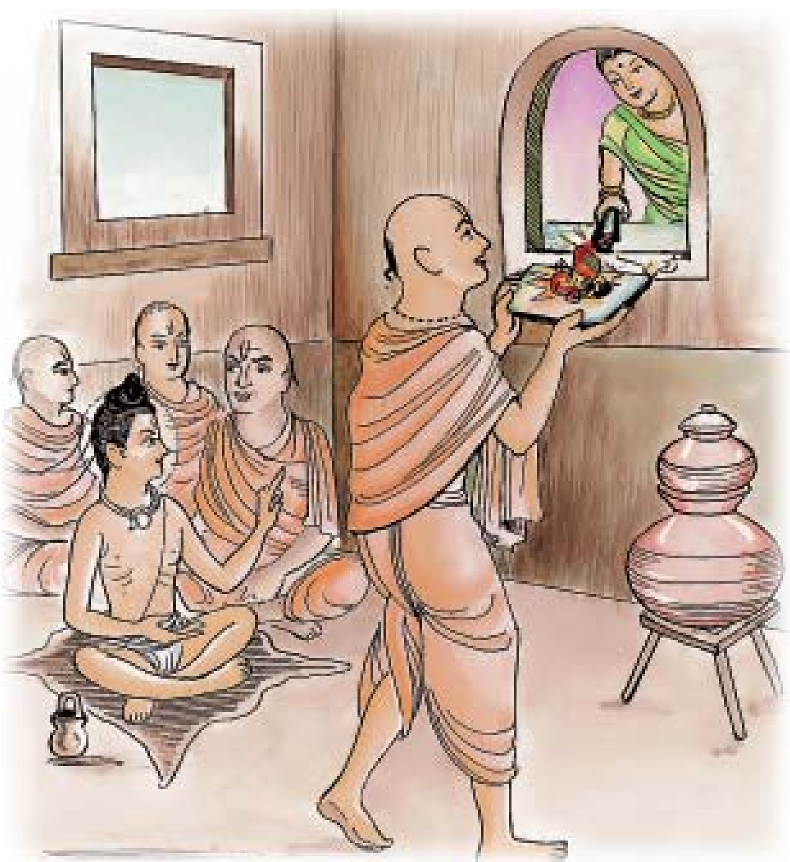
The next day, when the assembly commenced, Nilkanth got up again and told the sadhus, "O sadhus and devotees! Come to the mandir now and I shall discourse to you. To listen to discourses with women in this way is not *dharma*." Then Nilkanth walked off towards the mandir. The sadhus and devotees followed him. Only women were left in the assembly. Muktanand Swami realised his mistake and said to the women sitting there, "Good bye to you all. From this day onwards, there will be separate assemblies for men and women."

Even though Muktanand Swami was senior to Nilkanth and the principal disciple of Ramanand Swami, the influence of Nilkanth's divine personality on him was tremendous. He respectfully accepted the assembly change introduced by Nilkanth. It was the first chapter in introducing a spiritual discipline for men and women by Nilkanth Varni.

47. PLUGGED THE HOLE IN THE WALL

Another significant event followed soon after. Adjoining the ashram of Ramanand Swami was a barber's house. There was a small window in the wall common between the two places. Whenever required, the sadhus of

the ashram and the barber's wife used to exchange fire for their respective ovens through that window. Nilkanth's eyes fell on that window. He called Muktanand Swami and said, "Swami, this window in the wall will one day definitely cause a breach in the moral conduct of sadhus. The sadhus should not have such contact with women." Then without waiting for Muktanand Swami's consent, Nilkanth closed the window with brick and mortar. The sadhus simply looked on and Muktanand Swami too felt that Varni had taken the appropriate action.



A sadhu accepts red hot embers from an adjoining house

Thus did Nilkanth bring about purity in religion and in the conduct of sadhus of the Sampraday. Everyone in the ashram was inspired with reverence for Nilkanth.

48. "CLING TO THE PILLAR."

Varni was now eager to meet Ramanand Swami. One day Anandjibhai Sanghedia came to Loj for the *darshan* of Muktanand Swami. he was going to Bhuj. After having the *darshan* of Nilkanth, he found out details of the ashram activities and then went to Ramanand Swami. On reaching Bhuj, Ramanand Swami eagerly enquired as to what was happening at Loj. Then he told Mayaram Bhatt, "Go to Loj and tell Nilkanth that if he wants to be a part of Satsang, he should cling to the pillar."

After a few days Mayaram Bhatt and Anandjibhai returned to Loj with Ramanand Swami's message. No sooner did he hear of the message, Nilkanth stood up and embraced a pillar. Muktanand Swami and all other sadhus were greatly surprised at Nilkanth's briskness in obeying the order of the guru.

On seeing Nilkanth clinging to the pillar Mayaram Bhatt said, "Brahmachariji, what the guru meant was that you should obey the commands of Muktanand Swami who is like a pillar in Satsang."

Nilkanth bowed to Muktanand Swami and the latter embraced the young Brahmachari.

Ever since Nilkanth came in the ashram, the sadhus had become very alert in their moral duties. The next day Varni was given two upper cloths and a long cloth. Muktanand Swami requested him to put on the cloths and said, "From today you shall be called Sarjudas because you come from the place through which the river Sarju flows."

Nilkanth was amused on hearing this and said, "Swami! I am a guide who leads people along the path to

Brahmapur. I have forgotten the land of Saryu and several other regions."

Thereafter Sarjudas engaged himself in the services of the ashram. He started teaching all the sadhus yogic exercises. He would eat only once a day in the afternoon. It was a frugal meal consisting of *rotlo*, chilli and a ball of *mindhiaval*. He used to get up early, draw water for the morning bath and serve the sadhus in various ways. He would pick up the *kavad* and go on begging rounds in the neighbouring villages and also pick cow dung for fuel. He used to spend the whole day in serving the ashram and performing *bhakti*.

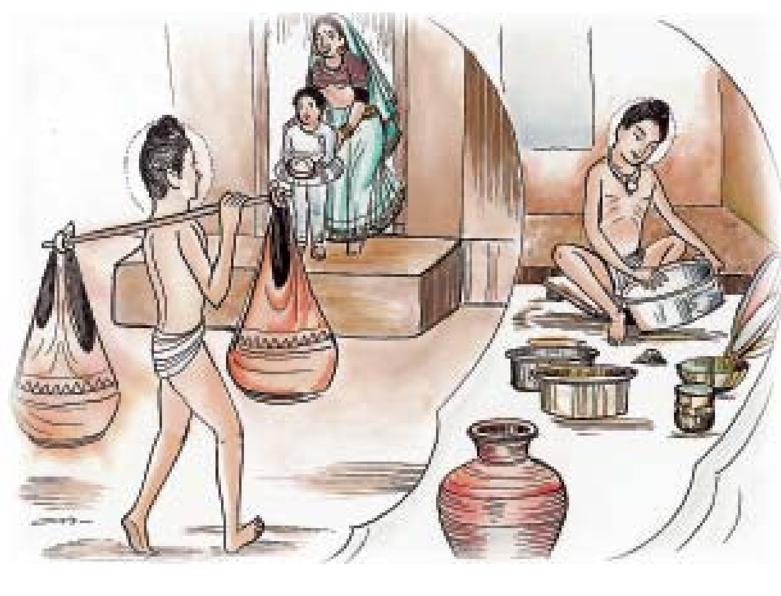
One day a *vairagi* came. The sadhus started giving him some food they had got as alms. But he would not take it. But when Sarjudas sat down for his meal he saw a half *rotlo* and a ball of hot chillies being served. The *bawa* took it to be a sweet and asked for it. When he had a morsel of *rotlo* and the ball that seemed like a *ladu* he felt a burning sensation on his tongue, mouth and eyes. His eyes started watering. Nilkanth took pity on him and gave him some ghee to drink in order to relieve him of his discomfort. After a while the *bawa* felt relieved.

49. MIRACLES GALORE

Even village-folks started calling Nilkanth as Sarjudas. Young Sarjudas became the darling of all. Following Ramanand Swami's command Nilkanth stayed at the ashram under Muktanand Swami. Nilkanth made himself useful to the ashram and its inmates in different ways. He would collect dung for making fuel cakes, sweep the floor, wash dishes, draw water for sadhus to bathe. He would then go seeking alms chanting "Ram-Krishna Dhuni Dhuni, Ram-Krishna Dhuni Dhuni" with a *kavad* slung across his shoulder.

During late afternoon when he would go out collecting cow dung for fuel, the village girls and women would also come onto the streets to collect dung in their baskets. Everyone would rush to get the dung. Whenever any girl or woman bent down to pick a lump of dung, Varni would use his divine powers and make her see the universe in it. On seeing rivers, mountains, trees, chasms, jungles, clouds, lightening, etc. the women would step back in fear and leave the dung alone. Nilkanth would then pick it up and thus collect the maximum amount of dung. He would then make dung cakes by mixing it with hay and grass.

Sheel village was six kilometres from Loj. Two devotees had an abundant crop of cucumbers on their farms. They decided to give the cucumbers to Muktanand Swami for the purpose of making pickles for Guru



Nilkanth begs for alms in Loj and performs menial services in the ashram



The women see the universe in lumps of cow dung

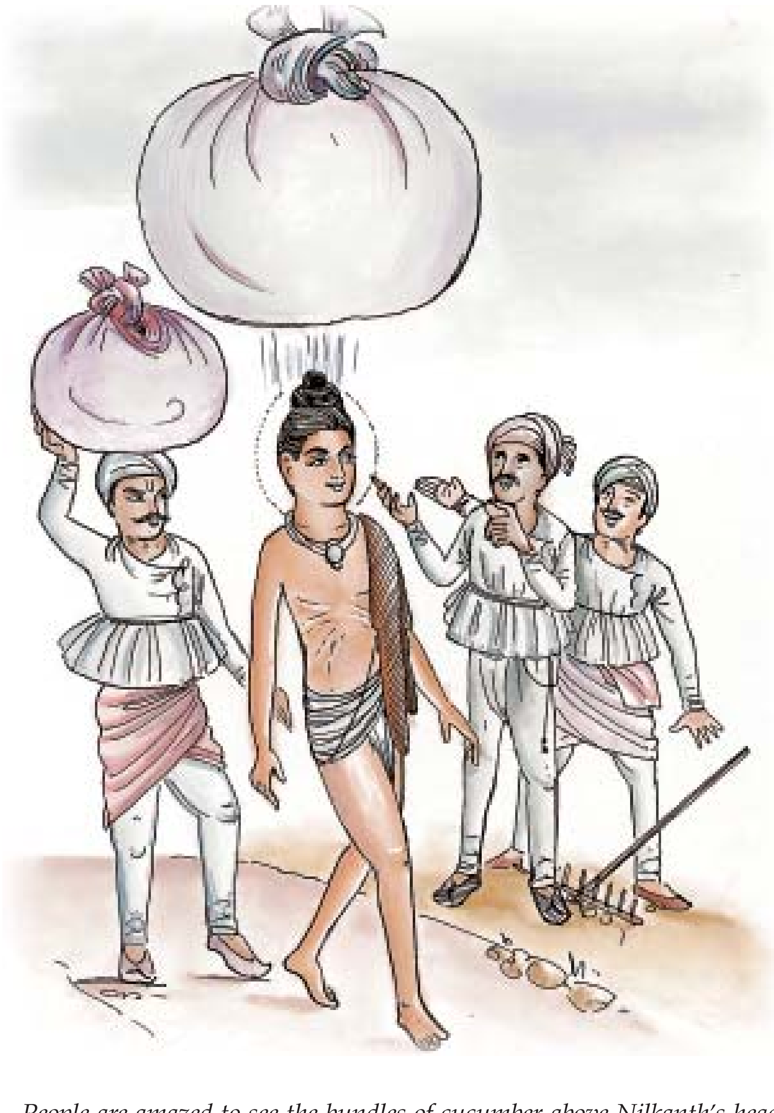
Ramanand Swami. So they came to Muktanand Swami and requested, "We have an abundance of cucumbers in our farm. Please send 12 to 15 devotees to handpick the best. It is our wish to have the cucumbers dried and pickled for Ramanand Swami."

Muktanand Swami told Sukhanand Swami, "Go now to the village centre and send 12 to 15 devotees to bring the cucumbers from Sheel."

Nilkanth, who was listening to the conversation, said, "Muktanand Swami, there is no need to call the devotees. I shall go to the village today with Deva Bhakta and bring the whole lot of cucumbers."

Muktanand Swami tried to dissuade him, "Nilkanth you are two weak. Besides, the two of you will not be able to carry a load of 15 to 20 *maunds* of cucumbers for a distance of six kilometres. Therefore, take a few devotees to help you."

But Nilkanth was persistent, "This service I'll render myself. It will be of no labour or difficulty at all." And so saying, Varni went to Sheel with Deva Bhakta to bring the cucumbers. After they reached Sheel village, Varni and



People are amazed to see the bundles of cucumber above Nilkanth's head

Deva Bhakta picked 18 *maunds* of *cucumber.* Then a devotee told them to wait. “I shall get a cart,” he said. “There is no need for a cart. Bring a large piece of cloth,” Nilkanth said. The cloth was brought and sixteen *maunds* of cucumbers were tied in the large cloth. The remaining two *maunds* were tied in a smaller bundle.

“Put the heavy bundle on my head,” Nilkanth said. It took twelve devotees to lift the bundle with great difficulty and place it on Varni’s head. Then to the surprise of everyone, the large bundle remained a foot above Nilkanth’s head. The second bundle was put on Deva Bhakta’s head. Then they both started for Loj. Nilkanth was walking briskly, whereas Deva Bhakta became tired and started perspiring after a mile. “I’ll not be able to carry this load,” he said.

Nilkanth said, “Why are you worried? See, the big slab of stone ahead. Get on it and gently put your bundle on my head.”

Deva Bhakta did as he was told. As they passed by, people were astonished to see the large and small bundles above Nilkanth’s head.

Soon, they reached Loj. Nilkanth set down the load inside the ashram and announced, “The cucumbers have arrived. Now tell the sadhus to take them inside in basketfuls.” When Muktanand Swami came with fifteen sadhus he was surprised to see the size of the larger bundle. Deva Bhakta told what had happened to Muktanand Swami. The latter realised that the young Brahmachari was a *siddha* yogi and touched his feet. The sadhus then carried the cucumbers inside the store room.

50. LETTER TO RAMANAND SWAMI

It had been seven months since Nilkanth arrived in the ashram of Ramanand Swami. It was now the month of

Falgun and still Ramanand Swami had not returned. Nilkanth was anxious to have the *darshan* of Ramanand Swami. He told Muktanand Swami, “If you kindly permit me, I would like to go to Kutch for the *darshan* of the guru.” Muktanand Swami replied, “The guru will certainly return here in a few days. Please stay here till then. In the meantime, let us write a letter to him.”

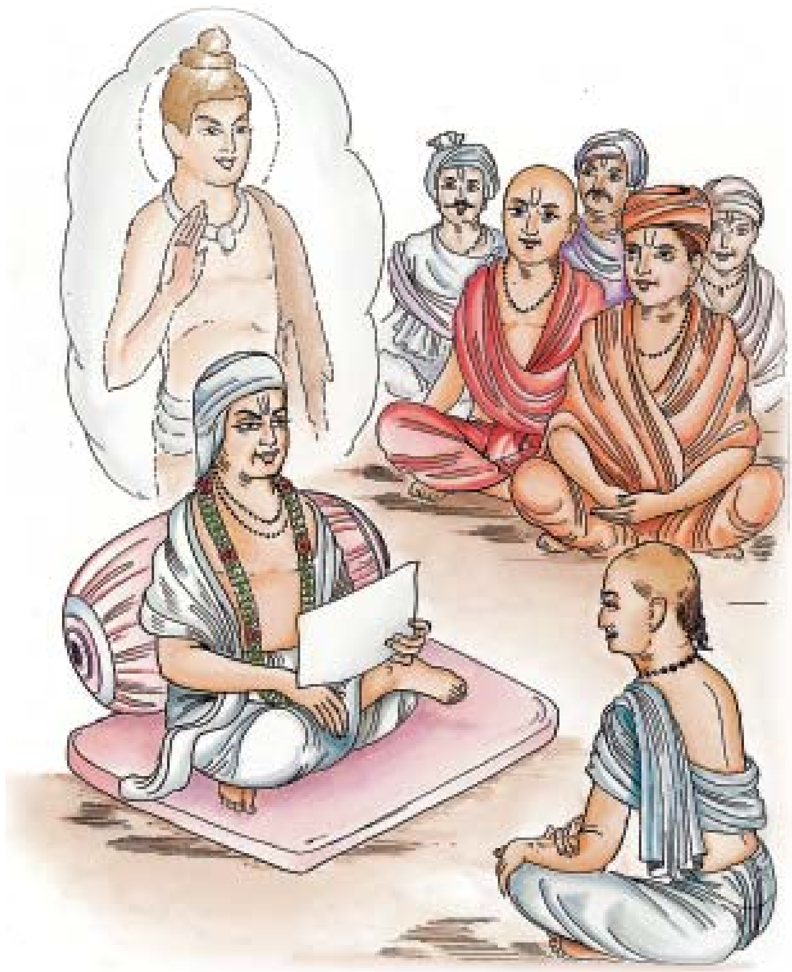
On 15 March 1800 CE (Falgun *vad* 5, Samvat 1856), Nilkanth Varni and Muktanand Swami wrote separate letters to Ramanand Swami. They were conveyed to Kutch by Mayaram Bhatt. He reached Bhuj after seven days, prostrated and gave the letters to Ramanand Swami. He was immensely pleased to receive the letters and out of respect touched them to his head. He pressed Nilkanth’s letter to his heart and then opened Muktanand Swami’s letter. His face welled with joy as he read it. Then he opened Sarjudas’ letter.* The words reflected Nilkanth’s divine personality, knowledge, detachment and devotion.

Ramanand Swami was overwhelmed with happiness and declared, “The one whom I had been waiting for has arrived. God has come in a human form to gift everyone with *moksha*.”

Tears of joy welled in the eyes of Ramanand Swami and he added, “Glory, glory to Varniraj! We have become relieved of all our burdens.” And then he addressed the assembly, “Devotees, today is a great auspicious day for us all. Through whom the *Bhagwat Dharma* will be established and thousands will become *brahmarup* and attain *Brahmadham*; that Varni - God - has arrived in Loj.”

To celebrate this eventful occasion, Ramanand Swami asked for sugar crystals and gave handfuls to Mayaram Bhatt.

* The historic letter of Nilkanth is showcased in the ‘Prasadi Mandapam’ at Akshardham, Gandhinagar.



Ramanand Swami receives Nilkanth's letter

"Bhattji, I give you these sugar crystals because you have brought the good news. I have given you only this much but Varni will give you a lot more and make you happier." And then Ramanand Swami distributed sugar crystals to all the devotees.

The next day, Ramanand Swami wrote letters to

Varniraj and Muktanand Swami and instructed Mayaram Bhatt to return with the two letters. He said to him, "Mayaram, take these two letters and give them to Muktanand Swami. On your way, inform all the devotees about Varni's arrival in the villages you pass through. And tell them that I have instructed everyone to go to Loj for his *darshan*."

After a few days Mayaram reached Loj. He delivered the letters to Muktanand Swami. In his letter to Muktanand Swami, Ramanand Swami wrote, "Take care of Varni. He is not of this world, which you will realise in future. Arrange for all the sadhus to learn *ashtang yoga* from him. I shall come at the end of Vaishakh month." To Nilkanth Varni, Ramanand Swami wrote, "Take care of your body because you have still to accomplish many tasks. Stay there at present. Do not be in a hurry to come here.

Teach *asthang yoga* to all the sadhus. As you are eager for my *darshan,* I too am equally eager for your's. But I have to travel for the spread of Satsang and please the devotees."

51. THE GLORY OF NILKANTH

There was a village named Shekhpat. Lalji Suthar, a disciple of Ramanand Swami, lived there. He went to see Ramanand Swami in Kutch.

"Why did you come here all of a sudden?" Ramanand Swami asked.

Lalji Suthar replied, "A few days ago when Mayaram Bhatt was going to Loj with your letters, he halted at Shekhpat for the night. He informed me that Varni has arrived in Loj and he is greater than you. So I thought I should see you and acquaint you with the fact that Mayaram is propagating the greatness of Nilkanth in your name."

On hearing this Ramanand Swami told him, "Why did

you come here at all? I had sent word to all concerned through Mayaram to go for *Varni's darshan* in Loj. Why, then, didn't you go to Loj?"

But Lalji was not satisfied. He queried, "Swamiji, how great is Nilkanth? Is he as great as Dattatray, Rishabhdev or Ramchandraji?"

Ramanand Swami calmly replied, "They are all great. But Shri Krishna is greater than all of them. And Nilkanth Varni is the greatest of them all. He is the incarnation of all incarnations. However much we may extol his greatness, it will be inadequate. Even the greatest of yogis and *munis* meditate on him. Why did you come to Kutch without having Varni's *darshan?* Now, go to Lojpur, have the *darshan* of Nilkanth and pay your respects to him."

Lalji Suthar was surprised to hear this. Overwhelmed with joy, he then bowed to his guru, and left enthusiastically for Lojpur for Nilkanth's *darshan*. He felt blessed at Varni's darshan. After Ramanand Swami passed away, Lalji Suthar was initiated into the sadhu-fold and named Nishkulanand Swami.

52. MEETING RAMANAND SWAMI

It had been nine months since Nilkanth arrived in Loj. And still he had not been able to meet Ramanand Swami. So Nilkanth asked Muktanand Swami to fulfil his wish to meet the guru by any means. In response, Muktanand Swami inspired Varni to be patient because it would still take a little more time. Then one day, Varni told Muktanand Swami, "Swami, when you sit for *puja* tomorrow, I shall sit by your side." Muktanand Swami did not understand the purpose behind Brahmachari's wish.

The next day when Muktanand Swami sat down for *puja*, Nilkanth came and sat besides him. Muktanand Swami then started meditating. He was seeing Ramanand Swami in

his meditation. Sarjudas linked his mind through his yogic powers with Muktanand Swami's mind and had *darshan* of Ramanand Swami. The guru had a fair complexion, stout body, lotus-shaped eyes, sharp nose, broad forehead and a deep navel. On seeing the beautiful form of the guru, Nilkanth was overjoyed. When Muktanand Swami finished his meditation, Nilkanth happily expressed his feelings, "I have had the *darshan* of Ramanand Swami." And then to the surprise of everyone, Nilkanth described the features of Ramanand Swami.

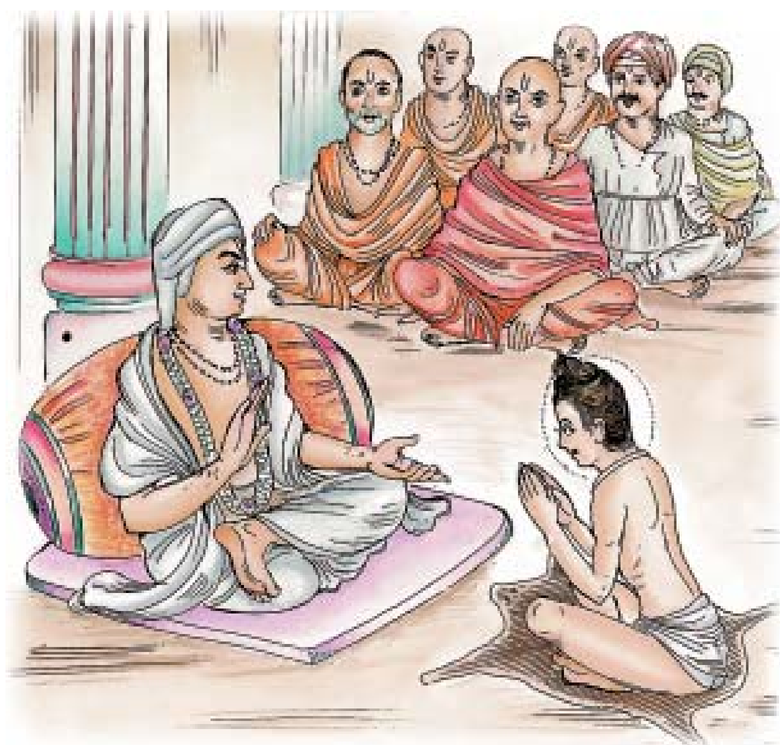
On the evening of Jeth vad 10, Kurji Dave brought a message that Ramanand Swami was to arrive in Piplana and had invited Nilkanth Varni and all the sadhus to come for his *darshan*. Muktanand Swami was immensely pleased with the good news and as a token of appreciation presented his *pagh* to Kurji Dave. The other sadhus too presented him with whatever they had as gifts. The news brought tremendous joy on Nilkanth's face. Since he had nothing to give to Kurji Dave he said, "Dave, I shall give you My Akshardham as a gift?" Kurji Dave did not understand the words of Nilkanth. The Brahmachari repeated his words. "Dave, what no one can give that supreme Akshardham I shall give you."

That very same evening, Nilkanth Varni, Muktanand Swami and other sadhus departed for Piplana. All through the night they walked in the light rains. Everyone was walking briskly because they were in a hurry to have *darshan* of Ramanand Swami. Whereas Nilkanth, who was physically emaciated, got tired easily.

"If you walk like this, then when will we reach Piplana? It is still very far therefore use your yogic power," Muktanand Swami told Nilkanth.

Nilkanth immediately exercised his yogic power and walked with the speed of an arrow shot from a bow. The

entire group was left behind and no one could catch up with him. Soon, Nilkanth reached the banks of the Ozat river. Piplana was on the other bank. The river was in spate and overflowing its banks. The current was so strong that even the mighty elephants would be swept away. But Nilkanth remained undeterred. He was eager for the *darshan* of Ramanand Swami. So he used his yogic powers and walked briskly over the waters of the Ozat river and reached the opposite bank. The entire group watched in amazement. Varni then had his bath, performed *puja* and waited for Muktanand Swami and others to join him. After an hour when the floods subsided Muktanand Swami and everyone crossed the river in a boat and entered Piplana



Nilkanth meets Ramanand Swami

together. Ramanand Swami was staying at Narsinh Mehta's home.

The day of this historic meeting was 19 June 1800 (Jeth *vad* 12, Samvat 1856). News was coveyed to Ramanand Swami that Nilkanth Varni and sadhus had arrived in Piplana. On hearing this, Ramanand Swami happily got up from his seat. Soon the group of sadhus arrived. Nilkanth was at the front. On seeing Ramanand Swami he started prostrating. The guru ran towards the young Brahmachari, raised him and embraced him.

Then Ramanand Swami said, "Muktanand Swami, do you know that the alms-centres we have started in the villages are for this Varniraj? I have been waiting for him to come for a long time." Then Ramanand Swami spoke about the glory of Nilkanth to all the sadhus.

Then a sadhu asked him, "Swami, you had often said that the main player of the show is yet to come. Is it this Varni?"

"Yes, it is him. It is your great fortune to have met him today. And when you realise his true form your joy will know no bounds!" replied Ramanand Swami.

53. THE POLICE CHIEF EXPERIENCES SAMADHI

One day Ramanand Swami, sitting on a mattress spread over a raised dais and resting against a pillow, was delivering his discourse explaining the glory of Nilkanth. Nilkanth Varni was sitting on a mat nearby. During that time a *jamadar* arrived. He was a Muslim but was very devout. He touched the feet of Ramanand Swami and sat down to listen to his discourse.

During the discourse, he experienced *samadhi* because of Nilkanth's grace. He had the *darshan* of Akshardham. He saw Nilkanth Varni seated on a beautiful divine throne in Akshardham. All around him infinite *muktas* were standing

and praying to Nilkanth. He also saw Ramanand Swami praying to Nilkanth.

After a while the *jamadar* woke up from the *samadhi*, stood up and exclaimed, "What is this? Why this reverse tradition among the Hindus? I find it quite improper. How is it that amongst you Hindus the preceptor sits on a higher seat and God sits on a lower seat?"

Ramanand Swami explained, "*Jamadar saheb*, you may not be able to appreciate our ancient tradition. Sage Vashishtha used to sit on a high seat, while Bhagwan Ramchandra sat down beside him."



Jamadar saheb realises the glory of Nilkanth during samadhi

Nilkanth Varni was amused by this dialogue. The *jamadar* could not understand much in this. So he simply bowed to Nilkanth and, scratching his head in bewilderment, departed.

54. RECEIVES VAISHNAVI DIKSHA

Nilkanth spent the *chaturmas* with Ramanand Swami. He also served in the Annakut festival during Diwali. Then came the Prabodhini Ekadashi (Kartik *sud* 11) of Samvat year 1857 (28 October 1800). Everyone in the ashram had observed an absolute fast.

After his morning bath and daily worship, Nilkanth bowed to Ramanand Swami and said, "Swamiji, you are my father and mother. You alone are my guru. Please favour me today with the *maha-diksha* and bless me."

Thereupon Ramanand Swami called for musicians who could play the *dhol*, *transa* and *sharnai*. He organised a great festival. He called learned Brahmins to perform a *yagna* in accordance with the mandates of the scriptures.

Nilkanth's head was completely shaven. Clad in beautiful clothes, Nilkanth came to Ramanand Swami in the *yagnashala*. Ramanand Swami placed a Tulsi *mala* around Nilkanth's neck. He applied *chandlo* and *tilak* on the young celibate's forehead. Then he smeared sandal paste on both his arms and chest and uttered the *guru mantra* in his ear and gave him two names "Sahajanand Swami" and "Narayan Muni." Ramanand Swami also gave him this precept: "Oh Sahajanand, observe religion and inspire all others to observe the same. Redeem all the *jivas* living on earth and propagate the significance of offering *bhakti* with God's greatness." Thus Nilkanth became Sahajanand Swami. Ramanand Swami was overjoyed that day. It looked as if he was absorbed in the *darshan* of Sahajanand Swami. Everyone else too was impressed and



Ramanand Swami gives diksha to Nilkanth

absorbed in the divine form of the newly initiated Sahajanand Swami.

55. APPOINTED AS HEAD OF FELLOWSHIP

Thereafter, Sahajanand Swami visited several villages with Ramanand Swami in Sorath. Wherever they travelled, Ramanand Swami spoke about the glory of Sahajanand Swami to the devotees. The devotees experienced great peace at the *darshan* of Sahajanand Swami.

Sahajanand Swami used to eat only a *rotlo* and some chillies everyday. Because his body was extremely weak, Ramanand Swami took proper care of him. Daily he had his body massaged with wax oil and asked him not to

undertake any fasts. He made Sahajanand Swami sit by his side for meals and served him with nourishing food and sweetmeats. He made him eat butter and sugar so that he may gain weight.

Thus a year passed. Once, Ramanand Swami called Muktanand, Sukhanand and other sadhus as well as devotees like Ramdasbhai, Mancha Bhakta, Bhimbhai, Parvatbhai, Mayaram Bhatt and others and asked, "I want to relinquish the *gadi* of this Satsang. Whom do you think I should install?"

All of them declared unanimously, "Swamiji, this child-celibate Sahajanand Swami alone deserves to be installed on the *gadi*."

Ramanand Swami said, "You have given expression to the wish I cherish most. Let us therefore begin preparations for the installation."

Ramanand Swami then called the leading devotees and held consultations for the installation ceremony. He ascertained from the Brahmins the appropriate *muhurt*. They indicated a *muhurt* on Prabodhini Ekadashi. Ramanand Swami then had invitations written and sent to all his disciples. He instructed them all to participate in the celebration with their families, and not to miss the occasion.

Ramanand Swami, thereafter, asked Mayaram Bhatt to make arrangements for the Brahmins and the *yagna* rituals. Parvatbhai was entrusted with the work of purchases. Bhimbhai was called upon to arrange for beds and quilts. Govardhanbhai was placed in charge of arrang-ing for ghee, oil, cereals and other provisions. Hirjibhai was asked to keep the accounts and to attend to the devotees. Thus Ramanand Swami distributed the work.

A spacious pavilion, which could accommodate thousands of devotees was set up in Jetpur. The *yagnashala*, kitchen, stables, etc. were all beautifully set up. Then the

entrance and arches were erected by planting trunks of banana trees. The whole *mandap* and the town of Jetpur was decorated with flags, buntings and festoons of asopalav leaves.

It was Kartik *sud* 11 (Prabodhini Ekadashi) of Samvat year 1858 (16 November 1801). The lanes and by-lanes of Jetpur town became overwhelmed with devotees. *Choghadias* had been playing from early morning. Sahajanand Swami, Muktanand Swami and Sukhanand Swami accompanied Ramanand Swami to the river Bhadar for the early morning bath. Then they all returned to the place where they were temporarily housed. After completing his daily worship, Sahajanand Swami prostrated before Ramanand Swami and performed his *pujan*.

Thereafter, all of them started for the *mandap* accompanied by the beating of drums and pipe-playing. The guards saluted the occasion by firing rifles in the air. Groups of sadhus were singing *kirtans*. Ramanand Swami and Sahajanand Swami were both seated in a coach driven by two horses. Thus the whole procession arrived at the *mandap*.

The *mandap* was resounding with the recitation of Vedic mantras by Brahmins. The *sharnai* and the drums were being played. The main *yagna* altar was in the middle of the *mandap*. A beautiful seat was set up and the whole atmosphere was rendered fragrant with incense, lighted lamps and sandalwood paste. The *murtis* of Radha and Krishna were placed in the *yagnashala*. Both Ramanand Swami and Sahajanand Swami went before the *murtis* and bowed to them. Then they sat down before the altar and offered oblations in accordance with the injunctions. With Yagnanarayan as a witness, Ramanand Swami held Sahajanand Swami's hand and seated him on his *gadi*.

Guru Ramanand Swami then smeared sandalwood paste and applied a *chandlo* of *kumkum* on the forehead of Sahajanand Swami and placed a garland round his neck. The whole *mandap* resounded with, "Victory to Shri Sahajanand Swami Maharaj !" The deities showered flowers from the heavens. Women sang auspicious songs. The devotees hailed the victory slogan. All the sadhus performed the *puja* of Sahajanand Swami. Then Sahajanand Swami prostrated before guru Ramanand Swami, bowed to all the sadhus and then sat down to receive advice from the guru. According to popular tradition, guru Ramanand Swami instructed, "Today, I have offered you the seat of this Fellowship, therefore abide by and foster the *dharma* prescribed in the Vedas. Perform *yagnas,* Vishnuyag and deeds for the welfare of people. Propagate *gnan*, *vairagya* and other spiritual values. Give *diksha* to those aspirants who are of good conduct, are detached from life and want to renounce the world. Spread the doctrine of *bhakti* imbibed with *dharma*. Inspire the writing of scriptures to consolidate the establishment of the Sampraday. Accept whatever clothes, ornaments, fruits, flowers and the like that are offered to you. Remove those from the Fellowship who are unworthy and averse to it."

After concluding his instructions, Ramanand Swami offered Sahajanand Swami beautiful clothes like *surval* and *pagh* to wear and necklaces of gold, pearls, diamonds and rings, circlets, armlets, earrings, etc. to put on. Ramanand Swami then performed the *arti* of Sahajanand Swami. The devotees were absorbed in a sea of divine joy. Everyone was attracted to the beautiful, divine form of Sahajanand Swami.

Thereafter, Ramanand Swami enjoined all the sadhus and devotees to obey the commands of Sahajanand Swami and to perform *bhajan* of God. He added, "I have arrived a



Ramanand Swami appoints Nilkanth as his spiritual successor in Jetpur

little earlier like Ganesh, but this Sahajanand is the master of all. He is Purushottam Narayan himself, transcending even Akshar who is beyond everything else. Therefore all of you should act according to his dictates and worship him devoutly."

Then Ramanand Swami told Sahajanand Swami to ask for a boon. Sahajanand Swami asked for two boons, "If your *satsangi* is to suffer the pain of one scorpion sting, then may the pain of the sting of millions of scorpions befall on each and every pore of my body; but no pain should afflict your *satsangi*. And if your *satsangi* is destined to have a begging bowl, then let that begging bowl come to me; but your

satsangi should not suffer from want of food and clothing. Please grant me these two boons." Out of compassion and love for the devotees, Sahajanand Swami asked an unparalleled prayer and boon from his guru Ramanand Swami. On seeing the magnanimous sentiment of Sahajanand Swami, the eyes of Ramanand Swami and the devotees became wet with tears of joy. Ramanand Swami granted him both the boons and said, "So shall it be."

During this historic occasion Mulji Sharma, the incarnation of Aksharbrahm, and Lalji Suthar were present. Mulji Sharma had offered respects to Sahajanand Swami by performing *pujan* and donating a cow. During that time Sahajanand Swami revealed, "This Mulji is my abode called Akshardham." On this occasion many devotees offered various gifts to Sahajanand Swami and thereafter a procession was carried out in his honour.

56. THE PASSING AWAY OF RAMANAND SWAMI

About a month had elapsed. Ramanand Swami thought, "The manifest form of Purushottam has been installed on the *gadi* and my work is now over. I no longer want to remain in this body." With this thought he went to Faneni village and became ill. There he told the devotees, "This Varni is God himself. Firmly believe this and obey the wishes of Sahajanand Swami. I have played the role of a drum-beater to gather you all and connect you with him. He will establish and propagate Bhagwat Dharma. He will open the path of highest redemption for all."

On 17 December 1801 (Magshar *sud* 13, Samvat 1858), while meditating on his seat, Ramanand Swami passed away and went to Akshardham. There was divine light all around. As news spread of Ramanand Swami's demise, thousands of devotees became overwhelmed with grief. At

that time Sahajanand Swami consoled everyone, “Great souls never leave this world. By obeying Swami’s commands one will not feel that he has departed, and one will come to realise the manifest form of God.”

From that day onwards a new chapter unfolded in the life of Sahajanand Swami.

Ame sau Swãminã bãlak...

Meaning:

We are the children of Swami; we will die for him. We are the youths of Shriji Maharaj; we will fight for him. We are fearless; we will not shirk sacrificing our lives, for we are born to die. We have launched this praises of Akshar-Purushottam. We are the sons of Shriji; we have our abode in Akshar. Consecrated as we are to *swadharma*, we have no apprehension whatsoever. Bhagwan Purushottam and Akshar, Gunatitanand Swami, are with us. We have accomplished our goal.

GLOSSARY

adad	a type of pulse
Advait	philosophy of absolute non-dualism
ahimsa	non-violence
Akhatrij	third day of the bright half of the month of Vaishakh (May-June)
Akshar	divine abode of Bhagwan Swaminarayan; Gunatitanand Swami
Akshardham	the abode of Bhagwan Swami-narayan; Gunatitanand Swami
akshay patra	inexhaustible bowl which gives food by wishing
akshividya	a yogic practice
ankush	one of 16 holy signs on God's feet; it is shaped like a thin-edged weapon to drive and steer an elephant
annakut	a variety of food dishes offered to God.
ardhachandra	one of 16 holy signs on God's feet; it is shaped like the half curve of the moon

arti	a ritual of moving a lighted lamp in one's right hand in a circular movement in front of a deity while ringing a small bell with one's left hand and singing God's glory
ashtakon	one of 16 holy signs on God's feet; it is shaped like an octagon
ashtang yoga	eight steps in yoga
asopalav	a kind of Indian tree
atma	pure *jiva*
Badrinath	a deity and name of holy pilgrim place
bal yogi	child sage
Bania	Hindu trader
basti	yogic enema
bawa	ascetic
Bhagvat Dharma	dharma related to God; dharma which is not different from or lesser than bhakti; also called *ekantik dharma*
Bhagvat	a Hindu scripture about the lives of devotees, incarnations and Bhagwan Krishna
Bhairav	a form of Shiv
bhajan	devotional song
bhakta	devotee; the choicest devotee of Bhagwan Swaminarayan i.e. Gunatitanand Swami
bhakti	devotion to God
Bhaktimata	Nilkanth's mother
Bhakti Sampraday	religious sect advocating devotional worship of God
bhang	an intoxicant made from Indian hemp flowers
Bholanath Shankar	Bhagwan Shiv

Brahma	deity of creation
brahmachari	celibate
brahmacharya	celibacy
Brahmadham	divine abode of Bhagwan Swaminarayan; Akshardham
brahmagnan	knowledge of Brahman
brahmarup	one who has realized Brahman. A transcendental state free of mundane desires and unbroken communion with Parabrahman
brahmavidya	knowledge of Brahman
chandlo	circular mark made on the forehead
chandan	paste of sandalwood
Charan	belonging to the clan of traditional poets
charmavari	leather-touched water
Chaturbhuj	four-armed form of God
chaturmas	four months of the monsoon
choghadias	fine drums
muth dal	split brown gram, a kind of pulse
daharvidya	a yogic practice
darbar	court of residence belonging to a king or rural ruler, traditionally with a central courtyard surrounded by rooms with verandas
darshan	seeing with reverence or devotion
Dattatray	an incarnation of God
deep	lighted lamp
deva	deity; divine being
dharma	righteousness, morality, religion, responsibility and duty
Dharmadev	Nilkanth's father

dhanushya	bow; one of the 16 signs on God's feet shaped like a bow
dharana	concentration
dhol	large drum
dhoti	a Yogic practice
dhyan	meditation; contemplation
dhun	repeated recital of name of God accompanied by clapping
diksha	initiation into ascetism
Falgun	month of Hindu Calendar. Corresponds to February-March
gadi	seat of religious head of a Sampraday
Gangaji	sacred river Ganga
Gita	Hindu scripture spoken by Bhagwan Krishna
gnan	spiritual knowledge, wisdom
gopad	one of 16 holy signs on God's feet; it is shaped like a cow's hoof
graha	stars; planets
guru	preceptor; teacher
guru mantra	mantra given by one's preceptor
Hatkeshwar Mahadev	a form of Bhagwan Shiv
Jagannathji	Bhagwan Krishna
jamadar	chief of police
jambu	one of 16 holy signs on God's feet; it is shaped like a blackberry
Janmashtmi	Shravan *vad* 8; Bhagwan Krishna's birthday

jata	big tuft of hair
jati	ascetic
jav	barley
jiva	individual soul
jivanmukta	emancipated from the bondage of life
jogi	an ascetic, one who is God-realized
juvar	millet
Jyotirling	one of the self-born twelve phallic representations of Shiv in various parts of India
kalash	water pot
kalpurush	an entity that is invoked in a gold *murti* which redeems anyone of disease and other afflictions
kamandal	gourd
kanthi	a double-threaded necklace usually made of tulsi beads worn by *satsangis* as a sign of affiliation to Bhagwan Swaminarayan
karma	action, deed
Kartik	month of Hindu calendar (October/November)
Kathiawad	Saurashtra region in Gujarat
kavad	bamboo lath borne on the shoulder with slings at both ends for carrying pitchers, etc.
ketu	one of 16 holy signs on God's feet; it is shaped like a banner
khichdi	cooked preparation of rice and *dal* grains
kirtan	devotional song
kosh	a mechanism to draw water from a

	well using leather buckets
Kumbha Mela	Hindu festival held every twelve years at specific pilgrim places
kumkum	vermillion powder used for making a chandlo
kunjar	a form of yogic practice
ladu	sweet item of food made principally of flour, ghee, and gur or sugar, shaped into small balls
Lakshman	brother of Bhagwan Ram
Lakshmi-Narayan	Bhagwan Vishnu with goddess Lakshmi
ling	phallus
Magshar	month of Indian calendar (November/December)
Mahadev	Bhagwan Shiv
maha-diksha	initiation ceremony into a sadhu
mahant	head of mandir
Mahesh	Bhagwan Shiv; deity of destruction
mala	rosary
mandap	pavilion
mantra	mystic formula; hymn; spell
Maruti	Hanuman
maund	20 kilogrammes
meen	fish
mela	fair
mindhiaval	medicinal leaves
mrigcharma	dear skin
muhurt	an auspicious time
mukta	emancipated soul
muni	sage; austere person
murti	deity in stone, painting, etc

muth	monastery
Nagar Brahmin	highest class of Brahmin
naishthik	staunch religious faith
Naradji	an ancient Indian Sage
Nar-Narayan	Bhagwan Krishna with Arjun
Narayan	God
neti	preliminary purificatory exercises in Hath yoga
nirakar	formless; impersonal
nirgun	beyond qualities
pagh	like a turban; an attire placed on head
panchajiri	item made of sugar and *dhana*
niyam	precept
paramhansa	the best of the four types of sannyasis
padma	one of 16 holy signs on God's feet; it is shaped like a lotus
padmasan	a yogic posture
patidar	title of respect given to a Patel
Parvati	wife of Bhagwan Shiv
Prabodhini Ekadashi	eleventh day of the bright half of the month of Kartik
pranam	a gesture of respect in which one folds one's hands and bows
pranayam	regulation and restraint of breath; the fourth stage of ashtang yoga
prasad	sanctified food
pratyahar	withdrawal of senses from their objects; the fifth stage of Patanjali's ashtang yoga
puja	worship of God; a collection of

	murtis, mala, cloth for *asan*, Shikshapatri, instruments for applying *tilak-chandlo* used in daily worship
pujan	liturgy; adoration
pujari	person who performs puja, especially in mandirs, i.e. mandir priest
Purushottam	Supreme Being
rajas	quality that generates worldly passion and restlessness
Ramayan	shastra that describes the story of Bhagwan Ram
Ramchandraji	Bhagwan Ram
Ramji Mandir	a mandir dedicated to Bhagwan Ram
Ratha Yatra	chariot procession
rayan	a sweet fruit-bearing tree
Rishabhdev	a deity
rishi	sage
rotlo	baked flat bread made of millet flour
sadguru	eminent preceptor
sadhu	ascetic
saheb	a title of respect used for one's boss
sakar	personal; with form
sakshat	in person; perceptible
sampraday	fellowship; sect
Samvat	Indian year
sandhya	a religious ablution and prayer among the twice-born or Hindus performed in the morning, noon and evening

sandhya vandan	Gayatri worship in the evening
sannyasi	Indian ascetic
sarovar	lake
sathvo	preparation made of flour
satchitanand	'existence-consciousness-bliss'
sati	chaste lady
satsang	spiritual association through listening of discourses, etc.
satsangi	member of the Swaminarayan Sampraday
sattva	quality of light, purity and goodness
Satyug	golden era; era of truth
setubandh	bridge
seva	service to God; service to man
shaligram	black round smooth piece of stone worshipped as the symbol of Bhagwan Vishnu
sharnai	indian clarion
shastras	scriptures
Shesh-shayya	Bed of serpents
shira-puri	a sweet and savoury dish
Shravan	a month of the Indian calendar. Corrresponds to July-August
Shri Ranchhodrai	Bhagwan Krishna
siddhi	accomplishments, achievements; extraordinary powers acquired as a result of gruelling austerities or naturally through spiritual maturity in *yogic* endeavours
siddha	realized soul; a perfect yogi
Shridevi	a goddess
sukhdi	a type of sweetmeat
surval	similar to a pair of trousers
Suryanarayan	sun god

swarup	form
swastik	auspicious sign; one of the 16 holy signs on God's feet
swastik-asan	a yogic posture
swayambhu	self-made
tamas	ignorance; darkness; principle of inertia of consciousness and force
tapasvi	one engaged in penance
tapovan	a grove where austerities have been performed
thuli	a wheat preparation
tilak	a U-shaped mark made on the forehead with sandalwood paste
transa	cymbals
trikon	one of 16 holy signs on God's feet; it is shaped like a triangle
Triyuginarayan	a deity
tulsi	the Indian (holy) basil plant, sacred to Bhagwan Vishnu, and venerated by the Vaishnavs as most divine
tyagi	ascetic; one who leads a life of renunciation
Uddhavji	a devotee of Bhagwan Krishna
upasana	way of worship
urdhvarekha	one of 16 holy signs on God's feet; it is shaped like a line pointing upwards
vachan siddh	a person who has power to make words spoken come true
vairagya	detachment; dispassion

vaishnavi	of Vaishnavs
vajra	thunderbolt
Vamanji	a form of deity
Varniraj	Nilkanth; king of ascetics
Vashishtha	guru of Bhagwan Ram
vairagis	clan of ascetics
Vishnuyag	sacrifice offered to Bhagwan Vishnu
Vishwanathji	a deity
vyom	one of 16 holy signs on God's feet; it is shaped like pockmarks
yagna	a Vedic ritual in which offerings are made to the gods
yagnakund	offering pit in which the *yagna* fire burns and into which offerings of grains, pulses, etc. are made
Yagnanarayan	the *yagna* deity
yagnashala	place where *yagna* is performed
yam	one of the eight steps of Yoga
yatiraj	king of celibates
yoga	process of union of individual with God; meditation or union with the Supreme Being
yogi	a spiritually advanced person with a perfectly unruffled mind under all conditions
yogic	pertaining to yoga